



# THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The Only Publication authorized by the Hon. W.F. Cody ("BUFFALO BILL")

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 12.

Price, Five Cents.

## BUFFALO BILL'S SECRET MISSION

OR  
THE FAIR HERMIT OF MYSTERY VALLEY



BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
"BUFFALO BILL"

BUFFALO BILL WAS QUICK TO SEIZE THE ADVANTAGE, AND SENT A BULLET THROUGH THE HEART OF THE COWBOY KING.





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## BUFFALO BILL'S SECRET MISSION;

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By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

### CHAPTER I.

#### BUFFALO BILL'S STRANGE STORY.

The chief of army scouts, William F. Cody, had returned to Fort Wingate one night from a lone expedition, just as all the garrison were looking upon him as dead, believing that he had at last met the doom so many had predicted he would, and wondering why he had not long before done so.

"Corporal of the guard! chief of scouts, Cody, is returning," repeated the sentinel, as he recognized a horseman coming at a lope over the plain.

And such a cheer as went up at the words of the sentinel was seldom heard, for that Buffalo Bill had discounted all predictions and again proved his title to "bearing a charmed life," was a joy to one and all in the fort.

He looked worn and haggard, and his horse was gaunt and weary, as they passed in through the stockade; but the greeting was a grand one.

Where he had gone no one knew, save General Carrol, the commandant, and even he had begun to regard the scout as dead, for weeks had passed since he had left the post on a secret mission.

Straight to headquarters he rode, dismounted, turned his horse loose to go to the stable, and was met by General Carrol on the piazza, so glad was that officer to welcome the great scout back again.

"Come in, Cody, and I feel as though I was welcoming you back almost from the grave."

"Not so bad as that, general, though I have been on a long trail, and a strange one, sir."

"I do not doubt it—you show it in your face, and

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I was sorry that I allowed you to go on the search for those mysterious people you had heard of. '

"And I am glad that I went, sir, for I found the secret settlement I had heard of, and wished to solve the mystery of, and I discovered enough to know that they need looking after, while I have a plan to submit to you, sir."

"Never content unless your life is in danger, Cody."

"If there is good to be obtained by the risk, sir."

"Then you found the valley?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was it what you had heard?"

"More, sir, for I found a mystery that must be uncovered."

"Well, tell me about your trip."

"I went on the trail, after leaving Fort McRae, which the Mexican who died here told me to take, and it led me into a country seldom traveled, down into the land of the deserted fort, old Tube Rosa."

"I struck the Tube Rosa range and found there a large lake in a most beautiful valley, situated by itself, for all approaches to it are desert lands, beyond which no one would suspect to find a garden spot of beauty."

"Yes, I have heard only indirectly of such a country there, but not that it was settled."

"Well, it is settled, General Carrol, as you shall hear."

"The valley is beautiful, fertile, the surroundings well timbered, grass abundant, and there is a large, deep lake of clear and icy water."

"I was surprised, I can tell you, sir, when I saw it, and yet my suspicions were only beginning with the first view from the range summit."

"But first, sir, I ran upon an adventure and a strange one."

"As I began to enter the unknown and beautiful lake land, I came unexpectedly upon what had been once the home, doubtless, of some old Spanish or Mexican don; but it was in ruins, almost, and seemed to have been long deserted."

"Halting to gaze at it, I was startled to hear voices, the first I had heard for days, and in English."

"There was a shot, a cry in a woman's voice, oaths in Mexican, and I knew that some one was in trouble, so I rode to the rescue."

"It didn't last long, for I saw a man in Mexican uniform lying on the ground, a young girl near him,

their horses close by, and they had been held up by several outlaws."

"One I dropped, the others skipped, and I found I had rescued a Mexican officer and a young girl, who, while on a ride had been attacked by road agents, who had not expected help near."

"A glancing shot on the head had stunned the officer, knocking him from his saddle."

"As the men dashed off and escaped me, for I didn't press them close, I admit, there being more than I wanted, one called out:

"'I'll remember you for this, Buffalo Bill.'"

"This showed that he knew you."

"Yes, sir."

"But go on with your strange story."

"In a few words, sir, the officer had revived, and from the young girl I learned that she lived some distance away, and the outlaws had sought to force from her some secret, what I did not know, and, as I felt that the villains believed I had help near, and finding out that I had not would return, I urged a quick movement to a place of safety."

The girl and the officer quickly mounted, the latter still half dazed from his wound, and I told them I would remain behind to check pursuit and then follow upon their trail."

"I did remain for a while, then left, but I stuck to the trail I had been traveling, thinking that they might think there was a crowd if I followed the girl and the officer."

"As I rode along I suddenly spied a glittering object on the ground, and picking it up I was surprised to find that it was a bracelet studded with gems. I will show it to you later, for I have it."

"Feeling sure that the lady had dropped it, I retraced my steps and picked up their trail, only to lose it, and I am certain that they covered up their tracks to throw me off the track."

"Search as I might I could not pick up the trail of the officer and the girl, so I gave it up at last and went on to the valley, to halt at a fine ranch I came upon and there ask hospitality."

"But to tell you first of this strange valley and its people."

"The settlement numbers a thousand people, is an adobe village, and the dwellers there are Mexicans, with a mixture of Americans and Indians."

"From Silver Lakes' settlement the ranches branch out in the valley, and there are some fine haciendas



among them, the rancheros being rich in cattle and horses, and a mixture of Americans and Mexicans of the better class."

"You surprise me, Cody, and interest me greatly," said General Carrol.

"I was greatly surprised and interested myself, sir, during the two days and nights I was in the valley.

"All seems peaceful there, too, general, and yet upon that valley rests a cruel curse, for it is under a ban of outlawry that is most mysterious, and the more terrible because the actors are unseen, unknown, and therefore secret foes.

"Upon this strange community hangs my mission of duty that I ask to go upon."

"Well?"

"I was struck with the beauty of the valley, the apparent wealth of the rancheros, and where I stopped was the home of an American, who was half Mexican, for he had had a Texan for his father, who had married a lady of Mexico.

"He received me with the greatest hospitality, and we became so friendly that he told me that night, as we sat together, of the ban upon the fair valley.

"I questioned him closely, for I wished to know all that I could discover, and he made known, though with considerable dread at doing so, that the curse upon the community was from the deeds of a secret foe or rather foes.

"Who that foe was no one could tell, and yet he was most in evidence at every ranch in the valley, upon which he levied tribute or blood money, I may say, and got it."

"But how did he do this?"

"By a placard stuck on the gate of a ranch house, or hacienda, demanding a certain sum to be placed in a designated spot on a day or night named, under the penalty, if refused, of a death in the family."

"This must be looked to, Cody."

"That is just what I am after, general."

"But why do not the rancheros have the nerve to put this unseen robber to the test?"

"They have, sir, and to their bitter cost."

"He has carried out his threats, then?"

"He has, sir, promptly and without mercy, and that is why they no longer refuse the demands upon them."

"I can hardly wonder at it, when an unseen foe strikes at those they love."

"He does more, sir, for he has taken from each

home a hostage, keeping them comfortably, as they are allowed to write home, but holding them against refusal of his demands, and threatens to thus keep them until he gains the purpose for which he is striving, a certain amount of money, I take it, sir."

"There is no doubt of it, and it is a novel way of gaining his ends; but still I believe he can be check-mated."

"I feel confident of it, sir, and for that reason I wish your permission, General Carrol, to go to that valley and solve that mystery, hunt down that unseen and unknown foe.

"You know that scout, Texas Jack, brought with him a dozen Texans as scouts, and they are all saddle sharps, superb lassoists, dead shots, speak Spanish more or less fluently, and are utterly fearless."

"They are all that you say, Cody."

"Now, general, I wish to take Texas Jack and his Texans and go to that valley and take possession of a deserted hacienda I saw there and turn ranchero, buying cattle and horses, and establishing myself there for the one purpose of discovering the daring leader who thus threatens, robs and persecutes these people, and I am sure, sir, that I can unearth a mystery that will fully compensate for our time."

"Cody, you can go, and take the men you ask for. You have been there, understand the situation, and know what you are doing, so I leave all to you."

"Now, general, as the owner of this bracelet dodged me, beyond all doubt, I have it to return to her and will do so. Here it is, sir."

"Why, it is worth a small fortune, Cody," said the general, gazing earnestly at the handsome bracelet.

## CHAPTER II.

### UNDER A CURSE.

Buffalo Bill went on to tell General Carrol how hard he had tried to find the owner of the bracelet, and what he considered proof that she and the wounded Mexican officer had covered up their tracks.

Then he continued his story about the strange valley, and the cruel curse that rested upon it, the ban under which it suffered in terror through the deeds of a secret foe, and which no one had the power to break or force to an ending, cost what it might.

"I gave that deserted ranch a close call, sir," resumed the scout, "for I was interested in it, and it was really a grand old ruin, avoided, as I found out



later by all, and feared, for it is known as the Haunted Hacienda, and also the Fatal Ranch, and the believers in ghosts all are sure that it is the haunt of evil spirits.

"I took it all in and made up my mind, sir, that it would be valuable for me to haunt when I returned to the valley with the force I was going to ask you to let me have, sir, and which you have kindly given me."

"Yes, and more, if you need them; but you can tell me more of this valley, I hope," said General Carrol.

"I rode on up the valley to the settlement of Silver Lake City without meeting a soul.

"That city, as they call it, is beautifully situated, and is composed of adobe houses, the people seeming to have very little to do.

"Some mine in the mountains, others of the men are cowboys on the ranches down the valley, there are several stores, saloons, and a blacksmith shop or two, with an old mission chapel and a priest.

"There is a half-way inn there, and if the landlord is not a villain, then his looks belie him.

"I told him I was looking for a ranch, and he told me there was none for sale.

"I asked him about the deserted hacienda, and he said that no one would live there, as it was haunted by evil spirits, and he either believed it, or could lie with as straight a face as I ever saw.

"He said the place belonged to some one in Mexico, who had inherited it, that every one who had last lived there had died over night, from what cause no one knew, for there were no signs of violence upon them, but all were found dead in the morning, as also every horse, cow, sheep and dog in the walled-in place."

"This is a remarkable story, Cody."

"Yes, General Carrol, but he told it as the truth, and there stands the deserted hacienda, with the graves, thirty-three in number, in one corner of the grounds.

"It was left, then, to go to ruin—to the coyotes, owls and bats.

"I asked the landlord as much as I dared, to try and find out who the maiden and the Mexican officer were.

"From what I could learn from him, if the one I rescued was the one he had in mind, the lady is known as Suelo, the Girl Recluse.

"She is the daughter of a Mexican nobleman, I heard, but lives alone at her hacienda, which is a fine one, with only her servants and a score of cattle-men, Mexicans, and all appear to worship her.

"But no one in the valley knows much about her, the landlord said, and who the Mexican officer was he did not know.

"I did not tell him I had rescued them, but merely said I had met them, and her beauty and his fine looks and uniform impressed me.

"I called upon the priest, but he was absent, and so I determined to bring the bracelet on with me, general, and when I go back I shall look up the owner, and then, sir, I shall take the deserted hacienda as my ranch."

"Well, Cody, you are the best judge of just what to do; but I assure you I will not only be anxious about you, but watch the result with great interest.

"If you need aid I will give you letters to the nearest posts, so you will be able to call on them for what men you may wish."

"Thank you, sir, and my idea was to stop at the Government corrals on my way down—for you know they send the cattle southward to feed in winter—and borrow a lot of steers and horses to drive to my ranch and care for, thus carrying out the idea that I had gone to the valley to settle and make it my home.

"I shall tell the priest that I will pay rent when the owner demands it, and thus keep my taking possession of the deserted ranch from appearing a lawless act."

"It would be a good idea."

"Come to me when you are ready to start, and I will give you all letters necessary to have you carry out your plans," said General Carrol, and Buffalo Bill departed, to prepare for his strange mission to the mysterious valley whose people lived under such a cruel curse.

All the garrison at the fort wondered what was going on when they saw Buffalo Bill ride away from the post at the head of fourteen of the best scouts, most daring Indian fighters, and wildest riders on the frontier.

They were dead shots, all of them, with rifle and revolver; they could throw a lariat like a Mexican, and they could ride as few men could.

Good-looking, most of them, well-formed, bronze-faced and with a reckless, devil-may-care air, they were the pride of the post.



Men and horses had been picked for a purpose, it could be plainly seen.

They had extra animals along, and half a dozen pack mules, well loaded with a camp outfit, provisions and ammunition.

Those that saw them waiting for the start beheld Texas Jack, the noted ranger scout from the Lone Star State, and next in rank to Buffalo Bill at the post.

Then there was another lieutenant of the chief of scouts in Wild Winfield, and these two men had a record to be proud of as plainsmen.

Blue Jacket Bob, Wichita Will, Mustang Frank, Rio Grande Dick, Lone Star Sam, and so on down the file, until, after the two lieutenants, came twelve good men and true.

"Where are you going, Texas Jack?" asked an officer of cavalry, passing the squad of wild riders.

"Don't know, sir. Got orders to get ready for a long trail, and am prepared for a fight, footrace, or siege, sir."

"I have not heard of any news that causes General Carrol to send out Cody and his picked saddle sharps," continued the officer.

"Nor have I, sir."

"Have none of the men an idea?"

"Not one, sir, and we are waiting for the chief of scouts, Cody, now, for he has gone to the general for last orders."

As Texas Jack spoke, Buffalo Bill appeared, coming from General Carrol's quarters.

He was splendidly mounted and armed, and his face was as serene as a May morn.

There was nothing there to indicate anxiety or dread.

"Which way, Cody?" asked the major of the post, pausing just then, while the other officer, who had been questioning Texas Jack, said:

"That's right, major, for I'm anxious to know; but they are all as close as clams."

"I am going southward on a scout, major," was Buffalo Bill's reply, and, saluting, he rode to the head of the line, and gave the order to march.

The scouts obeyed, following in two files, Texas Jack at the head of one, Wild Winfield leading the other, while two men brought up the rear, to keep the packmules closed up.

That the band of wild riders were curious about

their going, was certain; but not a hint came from their chief, and not a man dared to question him.

The start had been made after dinner, and after a ride of twenty-five miles a halt was made for the night.

Supper was had, all eating together around the camp fire, but no word fell from the chief's lips as to where they were going.

The next day forty miles were placed behind them, and the scouts knew that the chief had started upon a long journey.

So it went on for day after day, from forty to fifty miles being made, the cattle being well cared for, with long noonday halts, until the chief of scouts bore toward the right, into a land that was unknown to his followers.

"We will leave Santa Fe well to our left," said Texas Jack to Wild Winfield one day.

"Yes, but why does not the chief give us a hint of where we are going?"

"He will, in good time."

"Oh, yes; but it is an important trail, I feel sure, and connected with his trip southward which he has just returned from."

"No doubt it is; but the Government cattle corrals must be in this course."

"Yes, and I believe we are going after cattle; but to-morrow will tell, as the corrals and grazing grounds are on the headwaters of the San Juan, and that is the way we are pointed now, and we must reach there before two more camps."

The same style of conversation and guesswork the other scouts indulged in, and still the chief said nothing as to their destination, and all decided that it was to the corrals to drive back cattle.

But that night, when they went into camp, Buffalo Bill said, after all had had supper:

"Pards, I have had nothing to say as to our mission, as there was little to tell you."

"But, as we strike the Government corrals at noon to-morrow, I wish to say that we are to get there a large herd of cattle and a band of a hundred or more horses."

"Yes, we supposed that was what we were going for, chief," said Texas Jack.

Buffalo Bill smiled, and replied:

"General Carrol thought it best for me not to tell you my purpose until we neared the corrals, and then, if any of you wished to back out, you could



remain there, and I could find other men in your places; but I think I picked those men who will stand by me."

"Just try us!" cried Texas Jack, and the other men all cried out in the same vein.

"Now, though we are going to get cattle and horses, we drive them south instead of north, and I tell you plainly that we are going to a pleasant valley I know of, where I am to turn ranchero, and you are to be my cattlemen.

"That I do this for other motives than posing as a ranchero, you may all be certain, and that there will be hot work ahead of us I feel very confident.

"Does any man wish to remain at the corrals, or go with me to take from a people a cruel curse that rests upon them?"

The response to this question of Buffalo Bill was so earnest that he knew he had nothing to fear from any one of his riders.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE HACIENDA.

It was just one month from his leaving Silver Lake City on his northward trail, after his strange adventure in the mysterious valley, that Buffalo Bill rode up to the little inn where he had before halted, and was greeted by the same Mexican landlord, whom he had not particularly fancied.

Speaking English well, the landlord recognized the handsome scout, and said in a way that was meant to be hospitable, but which was full of curiosity:

"Ah, senor, you again come this way—is your stay to be short, as before?"

"On the contrary, Senor Riel, I am here to stay."

"Ah, senor! you like the Silver Lake Valley, then?"

"Very much."

"You are a gambler, perhaps, senor, or you have no business?"

"Oh, no, I am a ranchero, and have come to settle down the valley, near the lake."

"You amaze me, senor, for there is no ranch to sell there."

"There is one unoccupied, and may be for sale.

"I shall take possession of it, herd my cattle in the surrounding country, and, when the owner appears, will pay him what is just.

"Now, tell me, Senor Riel, if the padre is at home

— Oh, I see him there now," and Buffalo Bill walked rapidly away to where a small, dark-faced man was standing, dressed as a Mexican priest.

"The Padre San Juan I believe?" he asked, politely.

"Yes, my son, but I know you not."

"No; I am an American, and once passing through this valley, decided to find a home here.

"I called upon you, but you were away from home, and I have just arrived to settle here."

"How can I serve you, senor?"

"I have some miles away my cattle and horses, and my destination is the old deserted hacienda down the valley on the lake.

"I would ask you if you can place me in communication with the owner?"

"I cannot, my son, for the one who fell heir to that truly accursed place is a stranger, and was never here.

"It is a blot upon the valley, and will be a home of ill omen should you dwell there, which Heaven forbid."

"I thank you, Senor Padre, but my men and cattle are, as I said, near, and to-morrow night I will take possession of the ill-omened place, as you call it, with the pledge to you to pay what is right for its use.

"As we are all men, we need but little household furniture, and that I can buy at your stores here in Silver Lake City."

"But, my son, let me tell you that this whole valley is under a curse.

"A lovely abiding-place it is, as far as natural beauty, comforts and attractions go, but there is a secret fatality resting upon its people, a cruel curse as I have said, and if you remain here, especially within that dreary hacienda with its record of death, you but become another upon whom suffering must fall."

"I will take all chances, Senor Padre, and as the deserted hacienda is to be my home, let me say that I will be happy to entertain you there whenever you pass that way."

"Thank you, senor, thank you, but only in case duty called me would I cross the threshold of that house, for it is haunted by the cruelest of memories, if not worse. I wish you well, senor, but I have warned you—it was my duty."

Returning to the landlord of the little adobe tavern, Buffalo Bill told him that he wished to make



some purchases, and to get a wagon to take them to the deserted hacienda.

"You will go there, then, senor?"

"Oh, yes."

"The Padre San Juan warned you?"

"Yes, as you did."

"You do not heed warnings, then?"

"I am not superstitious, and so warnings of imaginary evils have no dread for me; but, if warned of a real danger, I heed, as I flatter myself that I am no fool."

The landlord shook his head, and then said he would furnish the means of transportation for what the senor cared to purchase, and he would take him to the best places at which to buy them.

The purchases were soon made, loaded in a wagon, and started upon the way for the hacienda, the scout, after having dinner at the tavern, starting on after the men, for they were already well on their way to the new home of Buffalo Bill in the mysterious valley.

The wagon was soon overtaken, and afterward the herd, and Buffalo Bill said:

"We now camp, pards, and to-morrow early we go into our home."

The night halt was made, an early start followed the next morning, and before noon the cattle were halted upon the rich meadowland on either side the lake, several scouts left to guard them, while the rest rode on after their chief, who had gone on ahead to the hacienda.

"If that is not an owl's roost I'm mistaken," said one.

"And a coyote den," added another.

"It may be worse."

"How?"

"It may be an outlaws' retreat."

"Or worse than that."

"How can that be?"

"The place may be haunted."

Some laughed, some did not; others looked grave, and said nothing.

The superstitions of a few had been aroused.

But into the walled-in plaza rode the scouts, followed by the wagon, and there stood Buffalo Bill, but his left sleeve was stained with blood, his face had a bruise upon it, and he had the appearance of one who had been in a terrible struggle.

"But," he said, calmly, "make yourselves at home, boys, for I am master here."

Telling Texas Jack where to halt the cattle and horses, to have a guard of several men over them, and then come on with the others and the wagon and animals.

The chief of scouts had cantered on alone to the hacienda.

As he approached it he saw that all appeared there as he had left it a month before.

To him it looked as though no one had visited the place, and he saw not even a skulking coyote.

This put him on his guard, for he knew that when he had visited the place first many coyotes had run out.

Now, having found none about, he at once concluded that some one had been there within the last few minutes.

So he was on his guard.

Leaving his horse in the grounds, he entered the hacienda.

It was a large structure, one story in height, built of adobe, and in the center was a square, tower-like structure, with a top that looked very much as though the whole space within the walls, several acres in area, could be swept by even revolvers in the hands of persons stationed there on the tower roof. In the rear was a lofty cliff.

It commanded, too, a wide range with rifles, and that it was intended for a stronghold there was no doubt in the scout's mind.

There were some thirty rooms in the building, but, as the scout said:

"Three or four will do for us, and the owls and bats can have the others."

There was some furniture there, too, chairs and bedsteads, but of all else the place had been swept clean.

Selecting the rooms that were to be their quarters, and being glad to see that the place within the walls would readily hold all their horses and cattle in an emergency when the entrance was repaired, Buffalo Bill was passing out through a long and dimly-lighted corridor, when he beheld before him what appeared to be two diamonds glittering in the half darkness.

But he was not deceived, he had seen just such balls of fire often before in his eventful life, and he was as quick as a flash in dropping his hand upon a weapon in his belt.



It was his knife, and he had just time to draw it and raise the point, when, with a savage growl there sprang upon him a huge mountain lion.

The weight of the animal, the blow of the body, and being unable to fully prepare for the shock, hurled Buffalo Bill backward, and he fell against the rough wall with considerable force, bruising his face badly, while he also felt the teeth of the mad animal buried in his arm.

But he had gotten his knife on guard, and the long, sharp blade had cut into the heart of the lion, the force of the spring driving it to the hilt.

Half dazed by the fall against the wall and the blow of the huge body against him, Buffalo Bill yet recognized that he must cut, and once more he drove his knife deep into the shaggy hide.

But to his joy he recognized that there was no need of his doing more, for the animal upon him was a dead weight, the first knife thrust had entered his heart, and the teeth that had been driven into the scout's arm had not been closed upon it, for the mountain lion had sprung to a quick and sudden death, the keen blade catching, by an accident, just in the right spot to kill.

Throwing off the weight, Buffalo Bill arose to his feet.

Was it from the concussion that he had received that made strange figures appear before his eyes, or did he really behold a ghostly form, clad in white, at the end of the long, dark corridor, one arm pointing straight outward, the other down at the ground.

"I'll tackle you, too, for ghosts are more to my liking than mountain lions," said Buffalo Bill, grimly, and he rubbed his eyes to see that they were not deceiving him, and, drawing his revolver now he rushed forward to grapple with this new foe.

But then, as he felt that it was no vision of the brain, but in reality a ghostly-looking form, not fifty feet from him, he halted and called out in a voice that echoed through the corridor:

"Hands up, there, or I'll fire and kill you!"

But the order was not obeyed, the form still standing mute and motionless, and pointing as before.

Instantly came a red flash from the scout's revolver, and a sharp report rang through the hacienda.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HAUNTED.

Buffalo Bill at once moved rapidly toward the spot where he had seen the white form.

Twice he fired his revolver as he approached to light up the scene.

But he saw nothing.

The rear of the corridor had no egress, only a window some eight feet from the floor.

Upon either side were doors, full a dozen feet from the end of the corridor, but one of these was closed too securely to open and the other was the one he had entered the long hall from and led into the rooms he had selected for himself and comrades to dwell in.

Not a particle of superstition had the scout, but here was a mystery he could not solve.

How had the mountain lion got into that corridor?

He had not entered by the door that he had, for that was closed and locked on the other side.

He could not have come through the window, even had he been able to leap that high, for it was closed.

The other door was locked or bound on the other side, but to have come through that way it could only have been done with the aid of a human being.

All the doors save the one the scout had entered by, were closed.

How, then, could the mountain lion have got into the corridor without human help, and who was the white-robed form at whom he fired?

Lighting match after match, Buffalo Bill looked about him.

He could discover nothing to show how the lion and the white form had entered.

There lay the lion dead.

The spectral visitant was gone.

And yet he had aimed to kill, and he knew that he was not one to miss.

Going out of the door through which he had entered, the scout closed it behind him, and, leaving the building, walked out into the bright sunlight.

His sleeve was wet with blood, and he was feeling weak and a little shaky.

But just as he was going to the brook to bathe his wounds, Texas Jack, Wild Winfield and eight of the men came at a canter into the plaza, as has been told.

They were startled at the appearance of their chief, but marveled when he told them so coolly to make themselves at home; that he was the master there.



They saw that there had been a death struggle, and he did not keep them waiting long to know what it was.

"I have had a fight with a mountain lion I found in the hacienda, Jack, and killed him, fortunately, before he did me much harm.

"Get my medicine case from my saddle, and you, Stevens, see just how badly he bit my arm, for you are the surgeon of the outfit."

"Yes, chief," answered Stevens, who had gone to Texas to practice medicine, but had become infatuated with scouting and devoted himself to wild life instead.

The chief's wounds were soon shown, and the marks of the teeth of the animal were seen below and above.

"It is not nearly as bad as I would expect from the teeth of a mountain lion," said Stevens, whom his comrades called "Doc."

"He must have been a small one," said Wild Winfield.

"No, he was large enough.

"I have him in the hacienda; but I saw the glitter of his eyes as he sprang, and just had time to get my knife ready, and he did the rest, for he drove it right into his heart.

"He was dead when he fell on top of me.

"But that is not all I found in the hacienda, boys."

"I see that your face is bruised and head cut," Doc Stevens said.

"That was done when I fell against the wall with the lion on top of me.

"Then I saw what I at first believed was conjured up by my half-dazed brain; but I fired at it, yet got no game."

"What was it, chief?"

"A ghost."

Some of the men looked startled at this announcement, while others laughed.

"Well, boys, I saw a human form, clad in white, and, as it did not obey my order to hands up, I fired. But I could find nothing when I looked for the dead body."

The words of the chief created an impression, for all knew that he was not in a joking humor.

"The truth is, pards," the chief of scouts went on to say, "we are not wanted in this valley, and I will tell you why.

"I had no idea that there was such a settlement as

this in this valley, and I wish to know if you had ever heard of it?"

"I have been through here, before, ten years ago, and it surprised me then, chief, but I have met no one else who knew that there was a settlement here.

"Then its people were Mexicans, Indians, negroes, and a few Americans."

The one who spoke was Lone Star Sam, a handsome, dashing fellow, reserved, courteous, and whom his comrades regarded as a man with a past that had left its impress upon him, for he never spoke of the bygone.

"What did you find out about it, Sam?"

"Very little, sir."

"What brought you here?"

"I was in search of one I was anxious to find, and, hearing of this settlement from a Mexican officer, I came here to see if my man was here."

"Was he?"

"He was not."

"Did you stay long at that time?"

"About a month, chief."

"Well, I found this by accident, on my last trail south, when on my return, and I wish to tell you about the strange valley and its mysterious people.

"Thanks, doc, you have made me feel all right, and certainly you are a good surgeon."

Then Buffalo Bill told his story, as he had to General Carrol, and let the scouts understand what discovery he had made, and what Senor Otega, the ranchero down the valley, had made known to him, though he did not say where he had got the information.

Continuing, he said:

"Now, boys, we are here to find out where these secret outlaws are.

"They are doubtless leagued for gold alone, but revenge may play a part in their actions also.

"That they have a retreat is assured by their keeping their captives as hostages.

"Where this retreat is we must find out.

"Who they are we must know, and when we have set our trap we must spring it in a way that will leave escape for none.

"A dozen there may be, perhaps more, to work so well and successfully.

"The landlord—Riel is his name—I do not trust, so beware of him; yes, and every one else, even the



Padre San Juan in Silver Lake, as he, too, may be a wolf in the garb of a sheep, though I think not.

"Trust no one, but keep your eyes and ears open, and be prepared at any time to fight for your lives.

"I am, remember, an American ranchero, and you are my cattlemen.

"We are here to stay, you can tell the inquisitive, and secretly we are here to ferret out the mysteries of this valley.

"The curse that rests upon it is a mystery, the secret band of robbers and kidnappers is another, my having met that Mexican officer and maiden is a third, while the masked man and his four unmasked followers is a fourth mystery. Then there is this deserted and haunted hacienda, and let me warn you that it has begun its underhand work already, for human hands led that mountain lion in where I found him, and the white-robed form I fired at was no apparition, and you are all too sensible for a moment to believe that such a thing could be.

"Now come up and see our quarters, and get the packs off the mules and unload the wagons, for I wish to get lanterns, and, first of all, make a thorough search of the old place.

"Where are the two wagon drivers?"

"Back with the men I left with the herd, for nothing would induce them to come any nearer to this hacienda, so one of the boys brought the wagon on, and when it is unloaded, will drive it back and let them skip, for they wish to be well on their way before night overtakes them, and swear they would not have come a step had the landlord told them where they were to take their load."

Buffalo Bill laughed at the fears of the two Mexicans who had come with the wagon, and Texas Jack went on to say:

"And, chief, those two fellows vowed that there was not a man in the valley you could get to come to this hacienda, day or night."

"All right. We don't want any to come.

"But we are men, and here we remain until I accomplish what I came for."

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE SEARCH OF THE RUIN.

The corridor of the hacienda was first entered through the wing the chief of scouts had selected for occupation, and it was seen that all save the door

through which he had made his entrance and exit was securely fastened.

Whoever it had been the chief had fired at, could only have entered by that single door, as far as could be seen.

There lay the dead mountain lion, the scout's knife wounds in heart and back, and he proved to be of enormous size, and all saw that it had been most fortunate for the chief that he had caught him on his knife point just as he did.

The rear window was opened then, and showed that it had been closed for a long time.

So did the wide front doors, which filled almost the other end of the corridor.

But the other doors, save that one through which Buffalo Bill had entered, showed plainly that they had not been opened for a long while.

That door the chief himself had opened from within the wing, and yet the lion had been found in the corridor, as also had the white apparition, whatever it was.

"Well, if a mountain lion could get in here, a ghost ought to.

"The lion was certainly not a spectre brute, as I have proof of," said the chief, with a grim smile.

That was what puzzled the scouts, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Those of you who are superstitious, remember, please, that the mountain lion was here, and only human hands could bring him here, and so the pretended ghost can be accounted for in the same way, only the trick is too deep and well covered up for us to account for just now.

"We will now look over the rest of the building."

And they did so, going into each wing, the chapel, and the basement in the solid rock beneath it, the second story, and up to the tower.

This done, and nothing found more than that it had been the haunt of owls and bats, for many were put to flight, the party blew out their lanterns and returned to the wing where their comrades had been hard at work.

With water from the stream, and brooms, they had cleaned up the rooms well, a fire was built in the large open chimney, the tables got out, chairs set around, the cooking utensils put in the fireplace, the bedding placed in the sleeping-rooms, and in little more than three hours the hacienda, in that wing at least, presented a very comfortable appearance.



Then the wagon was returned to the two waiting Mexicans, and the broken down plaza entrance was repaired, as it was decided best, for a few nights at least, to drive the horses and cattle into the walled grounds about the hacienda, so that they would begin to understand that it was home.

Just before sunset the stock was driven up, and the gateway having been finished, so as to make it strong again, it was closed for the night, and the scouts went to get supper.

Two guards were appointed for the night, one in the hacienda, one at the entrance to the grounds, and Buffalo Bill selected men whom he knew were not of a superstitious turn of mind, remarking to Texas Jack:

"If we put on a man who was looking for ghosts, this is the very place to find them, and he would be alarming us constantly with challenges of apparitions, so I just put on men who have no fear of the dead."

"You are right, for though there is not a man in the band who would not fight big odds if he knew he was facing men, several of the boys would skip at the sight of anything in this ruin they did not understand."

"I am sorry that you told them the ghost story."

"No, it was best, for if this hacienda is the haunt of outlaws, as I believe it has been, it will be by springing the supernatural upon us, that they will endeavor to frighten us away."

"Yes, that is so, and from that standpoint it was best; but the cleverness of that apparition act shows that they have some means of getting in and out that we are not onto yet, chief."

"Well, it won't be long before we are, if the men are not stampeded by a supposed ghost," was Buffalo Bill's answer.

Superstition inculcated into our lives in earlier years, gains a hold that is not easily shaken off, and a few years ago those who were not superstitious were the exception.

In the band of braves, for such all of them were, congregated in the hacienda that night, about half of them had a superstitious dread of the old deserted mission ranch.

Buffalo Bill saw just how these men felt, and he read the face of those who had no dread.

So he said, as all were seated in the ranch waiting to retire:

"Remember, pards, I believe that efforts will be made to drive us out of here to-night."

"Not by direct force, for, with our numbers and the men I know I have with me."

"But this hacienda is very old. Strange deeds have been done here, crimes committed, and most mysterious happenings have occurred."

"Now, there is no such thing, as all of you know, as spooks and ghosts, for the dead never come back to earth in spirit form."

"But, relying upon the fears of many that believe in spooks, wicked men play the ghost act to frighten all away from this place for a purpose of their own."

"My idea is that this place has been the abode of outlaws, and our coming here thwarts their game to keep hidden."

"As they dare not attack us openly, they will play the spectre game and try and stampede us."

"But that will not go with you, and as an extra precaution to-night I will keep four men on duty instead of two."

"Two of you can be together; a couple in the hacienda, the others about the grounds."

"But, remember, neither of the guards must move into the domains of the others, for my orders are to shoot everything on two legs you see prowling about, be it ghost or man."

"Now, Jack, you go on duty with three men until midnight, and I will relieve you then with three more."

This plain talk quieted the dread of those who had been feeling anxious as to what might happen, and Texas Jack went on duty with three men whom he called to follow him, being careful to select two of the three whom he knew had an uncanny fear of the place.

One of them he left on guard at the hacienda with a comrade who had no fear of ghosts, and the other he took out in the grounds with him, though showing no sign that he suspected either.

The horses were huddled together in one corner of the walled-in plaza, and the cattle were in another, all quiet and apparently wondering why they were penned up.

As the guards left the hacienda the others turned in for the night, and were soon fast asleep, Buffalo Bill setting the good example by dropping off instantly into a deep slumber.

Soon after the guards had gone on duty, the



horses began to grow uneasy, just why Texas Jack could not understand.

As they still continued their restlessness, he told the man who was with him to stand guard at the gateway while he went among the restive animals.

But the man preferred to go with him, and he said no more.

The two quieted the horses, to find that the cattle also were getting restive, and, cowboy fashion, Texas Jack began to sing to them, for, as he muttered to himself:

"If they stampeded they may break out, and about half the nags will go with them."

The cattle also became quieted under the weird chanting of the Texan, and then the horses once more became restive.

"Say, Pinto Paul, you stay about the horses while I soothe the split-hoofs with the melody of my voice, which can lull them to rest," said the Texan, in a light vein.

"Jack, give me an order to tackle the mate of that mountain lion the chief killed, or to brace up against a couple of outlaws, and I'll do it, but just here let me remark that I follow close on your trail this night, and I'll sing with you to the cattle, or I'll prowl with you about among the horses, but don't you expect me to play a lone hand, for I don't intend to do it."

"You are surely not scared, Pinto Paul?"

"Yes, I am scared, for I don't like watching for spooks; I'm badly scared, and don't you forget it, Pard Jack.

"Now, these horses see what we don't see, and so do the cattle.

"I tell you that this is no place for living men when the dead are prowling about."

Texas Jack saw that Pinto Paul was in deadly earnest, and he said no more, merely remarking:

"Well, Paul, if you think I am a foil to the ghosts we'll stay together, and we'll keep by the gate, so as to head the cattle if they make a break for it, and I'll keep up my song."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FIRST NIGHT.

The plaintive song of the Texan did have a soothing effect upon both cattle and horses.\*

\* It is well known that the cowboys sing to their cattle at night, and it does lull them to quiet.—ED.

Thus the time passed away out in the grounds, while in the hacienda when all became quiet it seems that the spooks began to get in their work also.

The first the guards heard was a low, moaning sound.

It sounded like a man in suffering, but just where it came from the two guards could not tell.

The superstitious one of the two was for rousing the men at once, but his comrade said:

"What for? We see no one, and it is merely a trick to frighten us, for the chief is right; this is an outlaws' haunt."

When there joined in with the moaning the sound of a woman weeping, Mustang Frank began to show real fright, but Lone Star Sam calmed him, and the two listened to the strange sounds. As though a man's moaning and woman's weeping were not enough, there joined as a treble the sound of a child crying like one in pain.

"My God, Lone Star, let us arouse the chief."

"No, Frank, it is nearly midnight, and he'll be on hand then.

"Besides, we cannot shoot, mind.

"This place is haunted by men whose interest it is to frighten us away; but we won't scare a little bit, Frank."

"Speak for yourself, pard, for I'm about scared silly this blessed minute."

Lone Star Sam laughed, and then said:

"Listen!

"I thought we would have more of it, for hear that dog join in the quartet, only I don't like the music—ah! here comes the chief."

Buffalo Bill just then came out into the corridor, Mustang Frank starting as the door opened.

"Well, pards, we are having a serenade, I hear.

"But it is time for you to turn in, just twelve, and I'll watch here, while Haskell stands by the outer door; but remain on duty until I return from seeing Texas Jack."

"Do you mean any one can sleep, chief, with this going on?"

"Yes, Frank. We were not born in the woods to be scared by an owl," was the answer, and Buffalo Bill left the corridor and met Wild Winfield, and the other two men who were to go on guard.

They were Haskell and Broncho Rawlings, and both of them were very nervous, for they had heard the weird sounds echoing through the hacienda.



"Winfield, you and the others come with me to where Texas Jack and Pinto Paul are on duty, and we will see if they have been disturbed by these outlaws playing ghosts."

On they walked and found Texas Jack having as much trouble to soothe Pinto Paul as he had to keep the cattle quiet.

"Anything wrong, Jack?"

"The cattle and horses, too, are very restless, and Paul thinks ghosts are about, but we have seen nothing, though we have heard the howling of a dog and hooting of an owl."

"Well, Jack, I will relieve you and Pinto Paul, and Broncho Rawlings will stand guard over the cattle while I take the gate."

"You, Winfield, return to the hacienda and relieve Lone Star, taking Haskell with you."

This was done, Broncho Rawlings taking his stand among the cattle, and at once beginning to sing as Texas Jack and Pinto Paul had done, for they were, indeed, restless.

Wild Winfield and Haskell returned to the hacienda, accompanied by Texas Jack and Pinto Paul, who muttered:

"I suppose it will be out of the frying pan into the fire in the old ghost nest."

The men were all awake now, yet not up.

But Texas Jack showed no dread, simply remarking that a ghost would be made of those in reality who were playing the spook act, and he turned in.

Pinto Paul, meanwhile, stirred up the fire for light, not heat, and sat by it, merely remarking:

"Now, I'm not sleepy a little bit, pards."

Wild Winfield meanwhile had placed Haskell on guard at the outer door of the hacienda, while he went in to relieve Lone Star and Frank.

These came into the large sleeping-room, and while Lone Star calmly went to bed, Mustang Frank joined Pinto Paul at the fire, remarking:

"I'm with you, pard, for I always was scared of a danger I couldn't see."

"Me, too."

"This old rookery is a graveyard from wayback, and, you bet, ghosts are on the prowl this night, for they've invited no company, and don't keep a hotel for men in the flesh, such as we are."

"Just listen to that music, will you?" and the weird sounds rang through the hacienda.

When Buffalo Bill had gone into the corridor he

had intended to relieve Lone Star and Mustang Frank himself, for the sounds were dismal enough, echoing through the old hacienda.

But when he visited the spot where Texas Jack was on guard he thought that the entrance to the ranch was the best place for him, after he had heard the Texan's report.

He knew if the cattle and horses were restless some one was causing them to be so by prowling about among them, and in some way exciting them.

If that "some one" could only stampede the whole lot, causing them to break through the gateway, then he and his scouts would be in a bad way indeed.

It was true that the gateway had been repaired, but not as well as was intended, for timber would have to be cut and hauled there to make it secure, and a rush of steers would break down the barrier that was there.

That any other demonstration would be made in the hacienda than the weird sounds already heard, Buffalo Bill did not believe, so he decided that he would keep his stand at the gate and let Rawlings guard the cattle, singing to them to quiet them.

The moment the others had walked away, Buffalo Bill had quickly crouched down in the shadow of the wall, just at the entrance.

He heard no sound save the impatient tramping of the horses, the singing of Broncho Rawlings, and an anxious lowing of a frightened steer.

An hour passed, and the chief of scouts muttered: "It's time, now, for graveyards to yawn, if ever."

He had hardly uttered the words when he saw that the horses were becoming more restless.

He would not call to them, but kept quiet.

A moment after his keen eyes detected a white object running along the wall.

It came from the corner where the horses were.

Keeping his position, Buffalo Bill watched the white object as he could distinctly see it.

The song of Broncho Rawlings was still kept up, and the cattle, too, became restive in spite of the lulling notes of the melody, for the singing scout had a most melodious voice.

"Broncho soothes them, but if I attempted to sing to them I'd stampede the whole outfit, yes, scouts and all," said Buffalo Bill, with a full realization that music was not one of his accomplishments.

The chief of scouts was upon the opposite side,



crouching in the shadow of the massive adobe column on either side of the entrance.

The white figure came straight toward him, and had Pinto Paul been where Buffalo Bill was, he would have stampeded with alacrity.

The white figure did not seem to be able to see well, for the scout had not been discovered yet.

Halting at the entrance, not twenty feet from Buffalo Bill, the "ghost" showed what its intention was.

It intended to break down the barrier, and thus leave an open way for the cattle to stampede.

But the entrance had been better closed than the midnight prowler in white thought, as it had some difficulty in its attempt.

But just then there came from the hacienda, rising far above the singing of Broncho Rawlings and all other sounds, wild and piercing shrieks.

The ghost seemed determined to break down the barrier as he heard the sound, but was suddenly startled by the stern command:

"Hands up, there, or I'll fire!"

A cry broke from the white-robed form, and, with a bound, he was off, when sharp, loud and deadly came the report of a revolver.

Just as Buffalo Bill pulled the trigger it seemed as though the white form fell heavily, and then Buffalo Bill's voice was heard:

"Turn out, all, to quiet the cattle."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A DEAD GHOST.

Out of the hacienda came Texas Jack and the others, while, springing before the entrance, Buffalo Bill called out, soothingly to the cattle, who began to crowd there, the other scouts doing the same as they came out.

There was a moment of suspense, but then the herd calmed down, as all the scouts, thoroughly trained cattlemen, began to sing to them.

Then Texas Jack went to the aid of Buffalo Bill, calling out as he advanced:

"Wild Winfield stands guard with several men in the hacienda, and I came to see who fired that shot, chief."

"I did. There is a dead ghost lying yonder, and I hope it will end this superstitious dread of the scouts," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

Texas Jack, seeing that the cattle were being quieted by the scouts, walked toward the white object lying thirty feet away, at the foot of the high adobe wall.

"Well, Jack, it's a flesh ghost, isn't it?" called out Buffalo Bill, as he saw his pard bend over it.

"It is, sir, and I'll call several of the men to guard the gate while we carry it up to the hacienda to have a look at it."

"Do so."

Several men at once came at the call, among them Pinto Paul.

"There's the ghost, Pinto Paul; at least, he is more ghost now than he was a short while ago," said Texas Jack.

"What is it?" he asked, in an awed way.

"A dead man."

"Who killed him?"

"The chief."

"That was your shot, sir?"

"Yes, Pinto."

"You fired at a man?"

"No, at a ghost."

"What is it?"

"A dead man, now, who was playing ghost a while since.

"He did not know that I was on duty at the gate there, for he heard Broncho Rawlings singing, and supposed he was alone on watch.

"As the ghost was trying to take down the barrier, to let the cattle out, I held him up, but, as he did not heed, I fired on him.

"I did not fire to kill, but to wing him, but just as I pulled trigger he fell into a hole I remember is there, and caught the bullet in a vital spot.

"But it shows that spirits can be killed, Pinto."

The scout made no reply, for he was beginning to see that if the hacienda was haunted it must be by flesh and blood of ghostly forms.

"I'll give you a hand, Jack," said Buffalo Bill.

But the Texan dragged the white form out of the gulley into which he had fallen, and shouldered it without an effort.

As he moved off toward the hacienda Buffalo Bill joined him, calling out to the scouts to keep the cattle quiet, while he went to investigate the ghost in the glare of the light.

Arriving at the hacienda, Texas Jack deposited his load before the fire, and lighted a couple of lanterns,



while Buffalo Bill walked to the corridor where Wild Winfield was on guard.

"Well, Winfield, how goes it?"

"All quiet, now, sir; but that shrieking was a blood curdler, even to me, and I feared it would stampede some of the boys along with the cattle."

"No, we headed them off. But keep your ears open for the slightest sounds, now, though I do not believe we will have any more disturbances. The ghost is laid, I think," and Buffalo Bill returned to the large room.

The fire had been brightened up, and, with the light of several lanterns, the room was very light.

Texas Jack had laid the form upon the floor before the fire, and, with a couple of the men who had come in, was standing looking at it.

It was clad in a white garment, made to resemble a shroud, and the head was also wrapped around, though two holes had been made for the eyes to peer through.

On each side, near the belt, there were two slits, through which the arms could be thrust.

The white covering was taken from the form by Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, and a dark, foreign face was exposed.

"It is a Mexican," said Texas Jack.

"Yes, and he came to kill, if need be," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the belt of arms the man wore.

He was attired half in Mexican, half in frontier garb, and his face was an evil one.

Also, about his waist was a buckskin belt that contained several hundred dollars in gold.

"Well, Jack, we need not report the killing of this man, at least just yet.

"We will wait and see if we hear of it, and, if so, the man who makes it known we will spot.

"I trust, now, the boys will not fear ghosts any more."

"I hope not, chief."

"Send each one of them here to have a look for himself, and they will know that I was right when I said an effort would be made to scare us away from here.

"As we did not scare, they will try some other plan to get rid of us; but, one thing is certain, that these men have some way of entering and leaving the hacienda we do not know of, but must find out.

"You see there is not a sound, now, for they know that one of their spirits has come to grief."

Texas Jack went out after the men, and they all took a look at the "ghost," made their comments, saw where the bullet of the chief had struck him in the head, and then the body was put in a vacant room, a guard placed in the grounds, at the gate, and the rest of the scouts returned to their blankets, Pinto Paul remarking:

"Well, I take no more stock in ghosts, though I don't just love this old owl's nest."

The night passed away without much sleep for a few of the scouts.

There was not another sound heard in the hacienda, and the horses and cattle quieted down.

This proved to the men that they had been frightened by the white-robed form going about among them.

The body of the dead Mexican was buried by some of the scouts, off to itself in the walled enclosure, while the others prepared breakfast and put things to rights.

After the meal was over Wild Winfield and six of the scouts took the cattle to graze, while Texas Jack and the others started upon a thorough search of the old mission ranch.

They were anxious to find out just where their disturbers of the night before had hidden, or, if concealed in the place, how they had got into it, and made their exit.

Having posted men here and there on the watch, one in the tower, one upstairs, one in the grounds, and seen the others start in the search, Buffalo Bill put on his best rig and rode away, his men wondering where, and why he had dressed up.

He rode his best horse, carried a rifle slung to his saddle, and seemed prepared to meet friend or foe.

That he carried no provisions along, after saying that he would not return until night, was also a surprise to the scouts, who knew that their chief was not one to miss a meal except on compulsion.

Down the valley rode the scout, and, following the lake shore its length, he turned, after going half a score miles, into a trail leading to the left toward the mountain range on the eastward.

Up among the foothills he saw a fine hacienda which he knew was the place where he had spent the night in passing through the valley a month before.



Toward this he wended his way, for he wished to talk with Senor Otega.

The senor it was who had told him of the secret band of robbers in the valley, of the curse that rested upon the people, and this had influenced him in coming there to solve the mystery, to hunt down the outlaws.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BUFFALO BILL ON SECRET WORK.

Buffalo Bill did not care to trust even Senor Otega with any secrets, for he knew not who he could place confidence in; but, having now come to the valley, being on the spot, he might find out from the senor some information that might be of value to him.

He wished to see just who the maiden he had rescued was, who the band of outlaws might be, when Senor Otega had said that not one of the secret foes of the people in the valley had ever been seen.

Then who was the officer in the Mexican uniform, and why was he in the valley thus attired, why the victim of these men?

It was to get at the bottom facts, as well as he could, that Buffalo Bill had started upon his visit to Senor Otega.

As he neared the ranch he saw the cattle and horses feeding near, the cowboys, five in number, guarding them and gazing curiously at him, and to these he nodded as he rode near and said, pleasantly:

"Good-morning, pards."

They returned his salute in silence, and were evidently surprised at seeing a stranger.

Going on up to the hacienda he saw Senor Otega just about to mount his horse, but discovering him, he turned toward him and said:

"Why, senor, you in our valley again? You are welcome, I assure you."

Buffalo Bill responded to the questions, and then said:

"But my coming prevents you from going on a ride, I fear?"

"No, for I can go another time, as there is no great hurry. I was merely intending to ride over to see the stranger who had taken possession of the old mission ranch and urge that he give up such a thought, for I deem it my duty to advise him."

"Thanks, senor. Do you know who he is?"

"An American of wealth, I believe, who came here with his people, cattle, horses and all."

"Permit me to say, senor, that I am the one."

"You, Senor Cody?"

"Yes, I took possession yesterday."

"You surprise me."

"And it is a surprise to me that you should know ach it so soon."

"I learned it last night from my men. But, senor, I am the more distressed, now, as I learn you are the man, for I like you, and to go to that terrible place is but to go to your doom."

"Not so bad as that, I hope, Senor Otega."

"The fact is, I fell in love with your beautiful valley, and, anxious to find a home, I decided to settle here, and the old hacienda was the only place I could get."

"So I came here from the northward, bringing my cattle, horses, outfit and cowboys with me, and I assure you we shall be most comfortable."

"You see I took an early opportunity to call upon you."

But Senor Otega seemed to be lost in thought and said, in an absent-minded way:

"Come in, come in! Why did you come to this valley, senor?"

"To settle here, at least for a while."

"You have your people with you?"

"Yes."

"A wife and children?"

"Oh, no."

"Thank God! Those with you are men?"

"Yes, all of them, and real men, too."

"I am glad. But why did you seek a home beneath that doomed roof?"

"Do you remember telling me the curse that rested upon this valley?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"You told me that your daughter had been taken from you by an unseen foe."

"Yes."

"Has she been restored to you?"

"Alas, no!"

"She is still a prisoner?"

"Yes. And, senor, only yesterday I paid the tax of one thousand pesos put upon me."

"It is an outrage."

"It is the seventh I have paid, senor, and I believe there are to be five more, if not still more, before she is returned to us."

"And other families pay this same tax?"



"Yes, senor."

"It is infamous."

"But they do not all pay the same sum, senor, for the tax gatherer knows well the circumstances of each of his victims, and collects accordingly."

"He does not put upon any one a sum that cannot be paid, for when I pay a thousand, a poor man pays a hundred, and one pays five thousand pesos, senor."

"Who is that?"

"A young girl, the Senorita Suelo Sada, known as the Fair Hermit."

"Ah! who did you say she was?"

"One left a large fortune by a kinsman, who owned the ranch where she lives, and she came here to dwell, but receives no visitors, has no friendships, and lives such a life of utter seclusion we call her here in the valley the hermitess, the beautiful recluse, and other such names."

"Who of her family are with her?"

"Not one?"

"Does she dwell all alone?"

"All alone, senor, save her servants and cattlemen, of whom there are quite a number, but they, too, hold themselves aloof from all others, and the stock men are known as the hermit cowboys."

"Then how can these secret tax gatherers, as we may call them, make a demand upon the Senorita Sada for so large a sum, as they cannot have any of her loved ones, senor?"

"Ah, but they have. She is betrothed to a Mexican officer, I hear, and he came here on a visit to her, was seized on his way home, and is now held a prisoner by these men whom no one knows."

"I learn the demand is made upon her regularly for five thousand pesos, and she pays it."

"Is the officer a man of any prominence?"

"He is a captain of lanceros, senor, in the Mexican army."

"It is strange that his government has taken no steps to release him."

"There is a threat to put him to death if such an attempt is made."

Buffalo Bill did not tell about his rescue of the fair hermit and the officer.

He merely asked:

"Do you know his name, senor?"

"It is said to be Del Sol."

"You know the padre in Silver Lake City."

"Oh, yes, Padre San Juan."

"Can he do nothing to help you?"

"He is under a ban also—a threat—if he does."

"And the landlord of the inn? The Senor Riel?"

"Senor Cody, I do not like that man, I do not trust him, though he, too, is under the ban, as his son, an only child, is a prisoner. Still, I have a dread of him."

"Well, Senor Otega, the secret foe can only capture me or one of my men, to get a ransom, and we'll watch that they do not."

"I did not come here to pay ransom to robbers; but I came here to settle, and I like our home, haunted though it may be."

"I told you that I intended to help you, and I am here to do so; but, remember, not a word of that to any one, for it might thwart my plan."

"I will be silent, senor, for something tells me you are here for good, to be relied on. I was going over to the old Mission Ranch to warn whoever had settled there to leave, for I did not know it was you. Are you sure that nothing disturbed you last night?"

"We heard sounds, the cattle were restless, but no harm befell us, senor, and we'll take chances, for that is what we are here for."

"How many men have you, senor?"

"I thought it best to bring at least half a dozen," was Buffalo Bill's evasive reply, for he did not wish his force to be known, even to Senor Otega. He had not allowed the two Mexicans who drove the wagon from Silver Lake City to see but six men beside himself, keeping the others off beyond the cattle.

"It will be best to have just double the number they think I have," was the chief of scouts' way of thinking.

Buffalo Bill remained to dinner at the hospitable ranch, and the senora, a sad-faced, lovely woman, gave him a warm greeting, for she had been pleased with his frank and genial manner upon his last visit to their home.

Late in the afternoon the scout started upon his return, the senor accompanying him a few miles on the trail.

Learning that he had just moved in, the Senora Otega insisted that she be allowed to add to his comfort, and when he was ready to go he found a pack horse ready for him to carry along, and it had been loaded with grapes, vegetables, preserves, and a large quantity of choice provisions, which the good lady insisted that he must accept from her, and added:



"Just turn the pack horse loose to-night, and he will come home and give you no further trouble," the senor said.

The scout was touched by the senora's kindness, and as he rode away with her husband, he said:

"You told your wife, then, that I was here to help you?"

"Not a word, senor; but I told her when you left a month ago that you were Buffalo Bill, the great military scout, and had promised to be our friend; and, with a woman's quick intuition where her love is interested, she feels sure that you have come to save our poor daughter."

"Yes, I saw that she was trying to read me, and I appreciate her kind gifts to make me comfortable. We will enjoy her bounty greatly."

As they reached the lake shore the sun was touching the horizon, and the senor halted and said:

"I will turn back here, senor, for my wife will be anxious. You see, we have lately received quite a handsome legacy, and if it were known, then our secret foes would capture me or my wife and demand a much larger ransom."

"Then return home at once, and I regret that you came thus far with me."

"You have the most dangerous trail to travel, Senor Cody, and a long ten miles."

"I am used to dangerous trails, senor, but if I thought danger might beset you I would return with you."

"Not unless you remain all night, senor."

"I could not do that. The ghosts in the old hacienda might put my men to flight."

The sun had now sunk behind the western range of mountains, and the lake valley was already darkening under the fall of night.

"That man is all right, for he told me of a legacy lately received. I came here prepared to doubt every one, but I'll set him down as a square man," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he rode along the lake shore, under the shelter of the fringe of timber, beneath which led the trail up the valley.

Senor Otega had turned his horse toward home, and set out at a rapid canter.

Reaching a belt of timber, the animal was walking along at his ease, the night having set in, when, without a warning, there settled over the senor's head a coil of rope, and he found his arms pinioned to his side, while he heard the words in Spanish:

"Resist, Senor Otega, and you are a dead man. I have men here to master you."

Senor Otega thought first of his wife, and groaned in agony of spirit, but said, boldly:

"What does this outrage upon me mean, for you call me by name, and hence know me?"

"It means that you are a prisoner, and the Senor Otega will be taxed to keep you alive," was the reply.

Senor Otega now, to his chagrin, saw that he had been lassoed by one man, and he had seized his bridle rein and stood by him, with a revolver leveled at his head.

But there came a flash, a report, and the kidnapper sank in his tracks by the side of the senor's horse.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SCOUT'S RETURN.

At first thought Senor Otega had believed that he had been the one shot at, and as his horse set a good example of flight, he determined to encourage him in it, believing there were other outlaws about.

But ere the horse had made half a dozen bounds a voice called out:

"Ho, senor, I fired that shot!"

Senor Otega recognized the voice at once.

It had a ring in it that once heard could not be forgotten.

So he wheeled his horse, and rode back to find the one who had rescued him standing by the side of the fallen outlaw.

"Senor Cody!"

"Yes; I had a dread that your coming with me as far as you did might get you into trouble, so I turned back to dog your steps, unseen by you, and see you enter your ranch in safety."

"How glad am I that you did, senor," and the voice of the ranchero trembled with emotion.

"I was not very far behind you, nearer you than thought, for you must have slackened your speed, and I distinctly heard the voice of your captor."

"I instantly sprang from my saddle, and, advancing on foot, realized that you had been captured, and I saw one man, but took the chances of there being more."

"As he was an outlaw, I thought it best to put him out of the way."

"God bless you," was all the ranchero could first say.



But he soon conquered his emotion and told just what his captor had said to him.

Buffalo Bill listened attentively, and then said, abruptly:

"This man was sent to kidnap you."

"Yes."

"He is alone."

"Yes."

"His being there shows that he saw you leave your home, was watching your return, shadowing you in fact."

"No doubt of it, senor."

"Well, I wish you to be guided by me in this matter."

"I will."

"Say nothing even to your wife of this attack on you to-night. I mean that no one must know of this attack on you, senor."

"But why, Senor Cody?"

"This man was sent to do this work. If he does not return to report, they will not know what has become of him, for I shall strap his body upon his horse, which must be near, take the animal to the lake, lead him in, and thence along the shore in the water to a spot near my ranch."

"I will search the body for any telling articles there may be on it, and will hide away his saddle and bridle."

"But the horse, senor?"

"I will give him into the keeping of my men for a day, and after they have branded him and disguised him, his own master, if alive, would not know him, and one of them will ride him, so he will not go back to his home, at least, not just now."

"You know what you are about, Senor Cody."

"I hope so. Now we will find that horse, mount his master on him, and I'll lead him back through the timber, not in the trail."

"And your horse, senor?"

"Is trained, senor, and will keep always in the trail as I start him until we reach the lake shore, and here I will mount him."

"What will this dead man's comrades think?"

"In my opinion they will track him, find his trail leading here, then back to the lake, where they will lose it."

"They will see that your horse was halted here, remained for some time, and the tracks will reveal that two men were here, their comrade and you.

They will take my footprints for yours, so you must not dismount."

"But when I have removed the body, you must move your horse about all over the spot, to mark out all traces of where it lay, for the ground is soft, I notice, beneath my feet. Then you go on homeward, and continue to gallop until you get there."

"But that will not explain that dead man's absence."

"Yes, for they will believe that, being alone, when he captured you, why you simply bribed him to let you go."

Going into the timber, Buffalo Bill was not long in finding the horse of the outlaw, and the body of the dead kidnapper was tied across the saddle with his own lariat, and then the animal and that of the Senor Otega were moved all about, until every trace of where the man had fallen had been destroyed.

Bidding the senor good-night, and promising to pay him another visit in good time, Buffalo Bill walked back to his own horse and the pack animal, turned toward the old ranch, threw the rein of the other over the saddle horn, and started them off at a walk.

Then he returned to the kidnapper's horse, and led him through the timber, and then on back over the two miles to the lake shore.

There he overtook his horse and the pack animal, and they were taken into the lake, but at different points.

Along the beach, ankle deep in the lake, they continued their way, over the miles that lay between the point where they had entered the water and the old Mission Ranch.

At last the scout left the lake at a place where his trail led direct to the hacienda.

He saw the glimmer of a light there, and he knew that it must be at the gate, and placed as a beacon to guide him home.

Not a horse or a steer did he see, and he felt that they had all been driven into the grounds again for safety.

As he neared the gate, the cheery voice of Texas Jack called out:

"Is that you, chief?"

"Yes, Jack."

"We were getting anxious about you, and not one of the men has retired."

"What, more ghosts?"



"Not the shadow of one, but the men wished to remain up to see if you came in all right."

"Oh, yes, I am all right. But I have a pack animal loaded with good things, for I have been off on a visit, and, Jack, I have another horse here, with his dead master upon him."

"Now, walls have ears, they say, and for fear the old hacienda may have some secret closets where foes are watching, I do not wish the men to breathe a word of this dead man."

"First, he must be searched, then buried to-night in the grave with the other one, and his horse must be disguised."

"I understand, chief."

"In the morning drive the cattle and horses over my trail to the lake."

"Yes, chief."

Feeling that he could leave all to Texas Jack, Buffalo Bill dismounted and entered the walled-in grounds, discovering that the men had during the day made a barrier that nothing could break through.

Then he went on to the hacienda, for he was both tired and hungry.

The men welcomed their chief in a way that showed how glad they were to see him back, and that they felt a most warm regard for him.

But he said nothing of his adventure other than to tell them to go out and see Texas Jack.

Buffalo Bill had no desire to say anything in the hacienda that other ears than those his words were intended for should hear.

He was very suspicious about the old structure, for, though it seemed one could discover if there were secret closets about it, he very well knew that such had not been found out, and they were certainly there.

This was proven by the mountain lion being in the corridor, the sounds of moaning and weeping, and the howling of a dog the night before.

Those sounds could only have been made by persons in concealment.

The scouts had discussed the matter among themselves when out of the place, and off from it, for the chief had warned them about talking when in the hacienda, and, where they could understand that men could have uttered the moans and other sounds, they could not comprehend just how the weeping of a woman and the voice of a child could have been heard.

"Pards, those ghosts must enter here by way of the cliff up yonder, so to-night we'll put a strong guard there to head them off," said Buffalo Bill. Yet

And so it was planned for the next night.

Going out to Texas Jack, they saw the dead body and it was quietly buried; then they took the horse in hand, and soon had him cleverly metamorphosed.

The saddle and bridle were taken into the hacienda and hidden, and all were told that they must utter not a word within the house that they did not wish to be known as there might be eavesdroppers while they did not wish to know their plans.

This all attended to, Texas Jack went up to the hacienda to report, and that also he had what he had been taken from the dead man put away for inspection on the morrow.

There was a guard of four men that night, two at the hacienda, two in the grounds.

Soon after midnight Buffalo Bill was awakened by low groans.

Where they came from he could not tell.

He arose in the darkness, and tried to trace the sound to its source.

But in vain.

Lone Star was on guard in the corridor, but he, too, knew not whence they came.

Then followed the sound of weeping in a woman's voice, as upon the night before.

"Go, Lone Star, and see if there is any disturbance among the cattle. I will keep watch until you turn," said Buffalo Bill.

Lone Star left, and the chief took his stand just in the middle of the corridor, and listened attentively.

As he listened there was heard the wailing of a child, as though in pain.

And the moans, the weeping, and the wailing continued.

"It all comes from the center of this hacienda either from overhead or from underneath, which I cannot tell," mused the scout.

Suddenly there rang out the wild, piercing shriek of the night before.

For a moment Buffalo Bill was startled, so close he felt it seem.

The men were all awakened by it, and upon their feet in an instant.

There was an alarm sounded, but just then Lone



returned, and reported the horses and cattle at.

Yes, and the same game must be played here to get these ghosts," said Buffalo Bill.

One Star had heard the shriek, for it had even waked the men on guard at the gate.

He said every scout was up and ready for business.

"This must not be," said Buffalo Bill.

"They must pay no attention to any sounds they hear, and then we will master the situation."

This order was given secretly to each one of the men, and they returned to their beds, though some did not care to sleep, as that unearthly shriek still rang in their ears.

The morning dawned, and then Buffalo Bill gave orders to each man to retire the next night early, and to pay no attention to moans, groans, weeping, wailing or shrieks.

"We will disappoint them, pardes."

And more, only one man need stand guard tonight in the hacienda, and one at the gate.

If there is cause for alarm a pistol shot will be the signal to bring up to the spot where we are hidden, but remember, nothing less than seeing a man to-night counts, for hearing them is nothing.

These orders were given away from the hacienda, where no one could hear, if concealed within the shadows.

The men to guard the cattle left early with the horses, and the trail of Buffalo Bill's horse and the led animals was blotted out to the lake.

One of the men even rode the horse of the dead trapper out on duty.

His heavy tail had been thinned out more than his mane, as also had his bushy mane, while two brands had been put upon him that looked old.

This was done by folding a cloth, saturating it in water, placing it upon the side of the animal, and then holding the red-hot brand against it until the water was scalded off, but the flesh not burned.

This gave it an old look, and the horse certainly could not be known by the man who had owned it.

Just at midnight a low moaning was heard.

As the wind had come up, and was whistling through the old hacienda it made the moaning seem more dismal than ever.

Then deep groans were heard.

A few scouts moved uneasily at this, but no one rose, no one spoke.

The weeping of a woman followed, without causing any disturbance among the sleepers, if any one was really asleep.

Next was heard the plaintive wailing of a child.

Still no one stirred. A few minutes after there was a perfect chorus of these melancholy sounds, and still the scouts lay quiet.

Suddenly, without warning, the same unearthly, terrible shriek which had before brought all the scouts to their feet echoed through the old hacienda.

To say that some of the scouts started would be but the truth.

But all had their orders from Buffalo Bill, and not a man moved.

The shriek had caused hardly any more disturbance than had the moans, weeping and wailing.

But, as though angry at having remained unnoticed, the shrieker sent forth peal after peal, until Buffalo Bill called out:

"Oh, quit that racket, ghost, and go back to your grave, for we can't help you."

The scouts laughed, and in a moment the sounds ceased altogether.

Nothing more disturbed the night's rest, and the morning dawned with the secret sleuths the victors.

Buffalo Bill rose early, and while breakfast was being gotten ready, he went out and scaled the cliff.

"Pardes, to-night some of us will camp out upon that cliff," he said upon his return.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SHOT ON THE CLIFF.

The secret sleuths all seemed particularly pleased with their chief and themselves, when they felt that they had not been turned out of their beds by the carrying on of the "ghosts," during the night.

Those who had been most superstitious took heart also, and began to feel that the "dead folks" were not so much to be dreaded after all.

The guard at the entrance had reported that the cattle had shown no restlessness, and he had neither seen nor heard anything to alarm him, save the wild shrieks up at the hacienda.

Buffalo Bill had picked out four men to accompany him to the cliff, when night came, to remain there on watch.



A guard was also to be stationed in the tower, one at the gate and another at the entrance of the living wing.

In case of an alarm five more scouts were to hasten over the wall, and, led by Lone Star, who knew the way, go to the help of those upon the cliff.

Buffalo Bill had selected to accompany him Texas Jack, Kit Kingdon, Rio Grande Dick and Blue Jacket Bob, all of them splendid fellows in a close fight.

And all were to take their rifles along.

They were to carry their blankets as well, so that all could sleep except one who watched.

Quietly they slipped out of the gate, after dark, and, Buffalo Bill leading the way, they went around the wall to the cliff and began the steep climb by the aid of the trees.

It was no easy task by day, and doubly dangerous in the darkness.

But the climb was made in safety, and when the plateau was reached the five men formed a line, and, spreading their blankets upon the ground, lay down to watch.

Buffalo Bill had taken the center position, and he told his men that they could go to sleep, as he would remain on guard and call them if he had any grounds for alarm.

The men were thus stretched right across the plateau from one cliff side to another, and about a hundred yards apart, just over the ranch.

But though each man spread his blanket, he did not go to sleep.

All were too anxious to make some discovery that would enable them to entrap the outlaws.

If there was an alarm, they were to rally toward their chief, and if their foes proved too numerous they were to give a signal for help from the hacienda, and then retreat toward the cliff overlooking it.

Midnight came and passed without any sound, and then Texas Jack, who held the end position on the right, beheld a form in white coming from the cliff that looked down from the range over the plateau, and which rose several feet above it.

He was instantly on the alert, and expecting that the one he saw was not alone, he dared not yet give the alarm.

Nearer and nearer drew the form in white, gliding quickly along, until suddenly Texas Jack called out, sharply:

"Halt! Hands up!"

There was a startled cry, a quick shot at rats toward Texas Jack, and the white form was off a deer toward the cliff.

Seeing that he must get away, Texas Jack raised his rifle and fired as the shadowy form was disappearing in the darkness.

Instantly all was excitement on the plateau, scouts rallying quickly toward Texas Jack.

But he had darted forward in pursuit, calling his comrades to follow.

Buffalo Bill was the first to reach his side, and was bending over a man lying upon the ground, groaning with pain.

"Stay and see what you can get out of him, Jay."

"Blue Jacket, run to the cliff and give the word for Lone Star Sam and his party to come in."

"Rio Grande Dick, light those lanterns and get them ready, but under cover, and then all of you follow me."

With these orders Buffalo Bill moved rapidly toward the cliff, and as quickly as possible his men followed, two of them with lanterns.

Buffalo Bill reached the cliff of the range above the spur, and as the others came they stretched out along its base.

Blue Jacket Bob called out to say that Lone Star Sam and the others were coming, and in a quarter of an hour they were on hand, and half-a-dozen lanterns were following like fireflies along the wall of rock which towered above the plateau.

But not another soul was seen, nothing was found, and the whole cliff seemed to be nowhere scalable.

But the scouts kept up their search until the dawn determined to see then if there was any discovery that could be made.

Stevens, the surgeon, had been called to the wounded man, and as Buffalo Bill went to where he lay, just as day broke, he found the scout deceased by his side, Texas Jack having left the unfortunate fellow to his care.

"Well, doc, how is he?"

"Perfectly conscious, sir, but he will utter no word."

"His pallid face shows that death is not far off."

"Yes, sir; I have told him that he must die, but he can live but an hour or more, and I could do nothing for him, though I have tried. But the war"



rtal," and Stevens showed where the bullet had  
ants way.

ffalo Bill knelt by the side of the dying man.

was beyond doubt an American, for his hair  
right in hue, and his eyes dark blue.

d was dressed in buckskin leggings, a blue woolen  
moccasins, and a slouch hat, but in strange  
uast, about him was wrapped a large white robe,  
ded to be white, though much soiled.

in had had on a belt of arms, but it had been  
ved by Texas Jack to make him more com-  
mune.

die man's blue eyes rested upon Buffalo Bill with  
ange expression in them.

ally poor fellow, I am sorry I can do nothing for  
a' said Buffalo Bill, kindly.

he man shook his head.

Can you not talk?"

f Yes."

he word was distinctly uttered.

Will you not tell me if I can serve you in some  
s "

gain he shook his head.

Why were you playing ghost, for you thus  
ght your death upon yourself?"

o reply.

Have you no kindred, no friends to whom you  
to send a last word, for faithfully will I obey  
command, and my comrade here is a surgeon,  
he says you cannot live?"

I will leave no word."

But would it not be best?"

o No."

If you wish your friends to know of your death,  
my word I will not tell them what you are."

Let me die in silence."

Doc, can you not give him something to relieve  
offerings?"

He refused it—he will soon be beyond suffering,

st then Texas Jack approached, and as he did so  
do Bill said:

Texas Jack, the poor fellow is dying, but will  
er no word to commit himself or betray his com-  
"

the blue eyes of the dying man rested upon the  
a, of Texas Jack in an earnest way.

black Omohundro, I know you. We were boys  
wder in far-away Virginia. And your hand has

ended my career. So be it, for I might have met a  
worse death—— Ah! I see that you know me now,  
but do not betray me here, nor to the people at home,  
who believe me dead years ago. Give me your hand,  
Jack."

Into the bright eyes of the Texan, who had wit-  
nessed many a death scene, came tears that rolled  
down his bronzed cheeks, as he grasped the hand,  
while he said, softly:

"Yes, Ned, I know you, my boyhood friend. We  
never dreamed of this in those old days. I will not  
betray you."

The Texan's form quivered with emotion, and a  
smile swept over the face of the dying man.

Buffalo Bill's fine face grew stern as death, but it  
was to force back the flood of feeling that rushed  
upon him, and Doc Stevens hastily drew his sleeve  
across his eyes.

"Jack, I will atone all I can for my evil past; tell  
you that which will let me die easy in mind, for it  
will save many from sorrow and suffering, yes, and  
some lives, too—listen to me while I can talk."

The scouts walked away, but the dying man  
recalled Buffalo Bill, who had removed his broad  
sombrero, as Texas Jack's fell from his bowed head.

Bold, fearless, reckless fellows that they were, the  
scouts all saw that their chief was respecting a death  
scene, even though it was an outlaw that was dying.

They beheld the attitude of their lieutenant, Texas  
Jack, saw that his hand clasped that of the dying  
man, and they bared their heads in compassion, for  
they knew that there was some link that bound the  
two together.

Later came the last words of the dying man:

"Jack, old friend, good-by."

All heard the words, saw the smile, and then be-  
held the ashen hue deepen on the face of the dying  
man, the lips set in the death agony, and, with a  
convulsive struggle, the end came.

Texas Jack folded the hands upon the breast, and  
wrapped the white, shroud-like robe about the form.

"He was my boyhood friend, pard, and as he  
asked me to keep his secret it will die with me," said  
the Texan. And to his dying day Texas Jack never  
made known the identity of the outlaw.

After the body of the dead outlaw had been  
decently buried down in the ranch graveyard, Texas  
Jack motioned to the chief of scouts, and the two  
walked apart together.



"You heard his strange story?"

"Yes, Jack."

"And who the leader of these secret foes is?"

"Yes, he is known as El Diable, the Cowboy King, is feared by everybody, and is the chief of cowboys on the ranch of the girl hermit."

"And you will act upon the information he gave us, friend Bill?"

"Of course, but not too hastily, as I wish to make a clean sweep of all the guilty ones, and have none of the innocent suffer."

"You are wise in that; but if you could trust your friend, Senor Otega, he might help greatly."

"Yes, but I'll know just who to trust before I make a move. I shall make a visit to Silver Lake City and see how matters are there, for I wish to see the priest, and also have a talk with Riel, the innkeeper."

"In fact, I expect to go on a still hunt and be much away, so you take full control here, and at the right time we will act and make no mistake."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FIGHT IN THE SLEUTH'S CAMP.

Several days passed away, and Buffalo Bill was absent from the camp, for, acting under his orders, Texas Jack had encamped his men outside of the hacienda and away from its immediate surroundings.

The chief of scouts was what the men called "playing a little game," in this, for it could give those who haunted the hacienda the idea that the scout sleuths were afraid to stay there any longer.

The truth was that Buffalo Bill was on a still hunt of detective work, and each one of his men was aiding him all in his power.

The scout had not been gone a day from the camp before visitors began to drop in there, a thing that had never happened while they were at the hacienda.

Just how it happened Texas Jack and his men did not know, or if they did they kept it to themselves; but trouble came, and at night, when the scouts were away from the camp.

Blue Jacket Bob and Rio Grande Dick were the two men left in camp, and following the arrival of three strangers came a fatal fight.

It was fatal to Rio Grande Dick and the three visitors, while Blue Jacket Bob was wounded.

To the surprise of Blue Jacket Bob, two of the cow-

boy visitors were from the ranch of Senor Otega, the other was from the hacienda of the fair and known to belong to the band who served cowboy king, the Senorita Suelo's chief of cowboys. Perhaps they had expected to find only one at the cowboy camp and rob it; but the three they found there had proven more than a match for them.

When Buffalo Bill returned to camp he found Texas Jack and the men save two, off on scout duty; but of those two there one was dead, Rio Grande Dick, and Blue Jacket Bob was wounded.

With Buffalo Bill came Senor Otega.

Doc Stevens had joined his chief back on the trail, fortunately as it proved, and as the three rode into camp there stood Blue Jacket Bob in the middle and he called out:

"Ho, doc, I have a wound in my arm for dressing, and it needs it, for I could not go to look up, being all alone in camp."

"Why, where is Rio Grande Dick, Bob?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I'm sorry to say, sir, that he is dead."

"Dead! Rio Grande Dick dead?" asked the doctor in utter amazement.

"Yes, sir."

"How was it, Bob?"

But Buffalo Bill could see that Blue Jacket Bob was suffering, and he insisted that he should make a report until his wound had been looked after. This was now done by Doc Stevens, who said:

"It is not dangerous, but he has lost considerable blood. Here is the bullet—give him a drink, please."

The bullet had been extracted from the shoulder, and a drink of brandy was given the wounded man. As soon as he was made comfortable he said:

"There lies poor Dick over there, chief."

"How was it, Bob?"

"You see that man lying yonder?"

"Yes."

"He was one of the cowboy king's men."

"Yes, I remember him, and next in authority to him," said Senor Otega.

"I guess he was; there is his horse hitched up," he left him.

"He came to our camp with two men."

"One said to us that they had brought a fine liquor and cigars, and wished us to join him."



said that we did not drink, but would smoke them, and asked them to be seated.

We all sat down here, and were talking when he came out suddenly:

Now!

The three men, with that, at once drew their revolvers and turned them on us.

But, though we were taken by surprise, we are on the draw, and our revolvers were going off theirs, and for a second or so it was lively here.

We all sprang to cover of the timber, of course, so we had it.

I don't think it lasted half a minute, and then I realized I was the only one standing up, and I was wounded.

I walked over to where those three traitors lay, and they were dead.

I then went to poor Rob.

He was gasping, but murmured something about not to kill us.

Then he grasped my hand, and the poor boy was dead.

As he spoke, Bob brushed tears from his eyes, and there were others who felt the pearly drops trickle down their bronzed cheeks as they thought of their comrade.

The scouts had listened with rapt attention to Blue Jacket Bob's story, and Buffalo Bill said:

Bob, you have done nobly, old fellow, and there is no proof lying before us of your plucky fight against them.

Now, senor, what is your opinion of the treachery of your men to-night?" and the chief turned to the ranchero, who replied:

"They came to rob this camp, senor, and failed, although they had one of the fair hermit's cattlemen as ally."

"What a pity that they all got killed, that we cannot entrap one alive, or wound and capture one."

"It is, indeed, a pity, Senor Cody. But you recall I told you the secret foes had spies on every hand, or were suspected of having?"

"Yes, Senor Otega."

"Well, these two were the spies, doubtless, on my hand."

"I see."

"And the other man was a comrade of theirs, and he a spy on the ranch of the fair hermit."

"I guess you are right."

"Now, what is to be done with these bodies, for poor Dick we will take with us for burial at the ranch?"

"It would be best if you ride over with me and report the affair to the alcalde."

"Who is he?"

"The landlord, the Senor Riel."

"All right," and to Texas Jack, who just rode up:

"Jack, you and three others be within call if I need you, for I may have to shoot the alcalde," said Buffalo Bill, to the surprise of Senor Otega, who cried:

"Oh, senor!"

"If ever there was a scamp, Senor Otega, that landlord is one, and I shall stand no nonsense with him."

"All right, sir, and you'll find us within call," said Jack.

With this, Buffalo Bill and the Senor Otega mounted their horses and rode away from the camp, Texas Jack, Lone Star Sam, and Mustang Frank following soon after.

The landlord was found in the Fandango Hall, at Silver Lake City, but he was called into his office by Senor Otega, who said at once:

"Senor Alcalde, we have an unfortunate affair to report to you."

"The Senor Cody I suppose has killed some one?"

The look the man got from the scout made him wince, but the words were calmly uttered:

"You must not jump at conclusions, sir, or I might be tempted to punish impertinence. I am here to report to you that two of our men were left to guard camp, while the rest were away. We returned to find that one of our men had been killed, the other wounded, and the three men who had gone there to rob the camp were lying dead, having been shot by our comrade, Blue Jacket Bob."

"This is bad, very bad."

"The three men were those whom we had reason to believe friends, for two were Senor Otega's cowboys, and the other was a cattleman of the band of the cowboy king, and he it was who arranged the robbery, which ended in the loss of their lives."

"This is bad, very bad. I must demand the man who did this killing, and while the Senor Otega goes to fetch him I will hold you as hostage, Senor Cody."

"You shall neither take Blue Jacket Bob, nor will you keep me here. I have reported the facts, and it is a pretty state of affairs when we cannot protect our camp



and our lives. If you wish a trial, name the day and we will be here."

"And I will guarantee on bond, Senor Alcalde, for the appearance of the accused man," said Senor Otega.

"I must have a guarantee from them also."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"You doubt my word, and I have reason to doubt you, and, in fact, do. No, I'll pledge my word, and remember, the Senor Otega here shall give no bond for us, and we will be here on the day you set for trial."

"I wish a guarantee."

"See here, Landlord Riel, you shall have one. With your own people you would consider this justifiable killing of three robbers and murderers. We are here in this valley as are others, and you shall not make us an exception."

"But I must punish murder," and the landlord was all in a tremor.

"There was no murder, save the killing of my poor comrade by those men who were murderers and robbers. Blue Jacket Bob acted in self-defense, and I'll tell you to your face, if you dare to attempt to hold me a prisoner, or arrest my comrade, I'll make known to these people the confession of one of those three men, and a dying man does not lie.

"I alone know that confession, Landlord Alcalde, or whatever you choose to call yourself, and I will make it known, and leave it for you to prove that dying lips lied.

"Do you grasp my meaning as I intend you shall, Senor Riel?" and Buffalo Bill looked the landlord straight in the face as he asked the question.

Senor Otega stood amazed at the bold words of Buffalo Bill.

He knew perfectly well that there had been no dying confession; he was surprised and startled at the daring shown by the scout, and flinging into the face of a man whom every one in the valley feared, a charge of guilt, as it were.

He glanced at the alcalde, expecting a terrible outbreak.

Instead, he saw that his face was livid, that his lips were drawn back from his white teeth like a snarling dog, and they were clicking together with a nervous chill.

"Senor Otega retire a moment, please, for I wish to ask our friend here of this man's confession."

The voice of the alcalde was hardly audible.

A glance at Buffalo Bill and the Senor Otega saw a sign for him to go.

"I will soon join you, senor, as the alcalde will not detain me long," said the scout, pleasantly.

When the door closed behind Otega the alcalde spoke in a low tone:

"Who made this confession you speak of?"

"I do not know the name of the man of the king's band," was the evasive reply.

"Ah! it was he?"

"Shall I tell you that the confession appears that of a man who sought to destroy you, alcalde, where there is smoke you will always find fire, and I to speak there are plenty to listen, though I might not believe that you can be guilty.

"Suppose we square this matter by your giving discharge for my comrade; in other words, acted in self-defense, and you bury the three boys, your expense."

"Yes, yes, senor, that will do, for I have no desire to prosecute you or your comrades. You are strangers in our valley, and I will give you the paper asked, and return your lips are sealed about the confession of the dying man. As you said, it was the malignant action on the eve of death, to ruin me, for we have some trouble several times, and there is not a word of truth in it."

"I did not tell you what he had said."

"No, no," and the alcalde looked most anxious.

"Just write out the paper for my pard, please, name is Robert Mead, nicknamed Blue Jacket Bob."

"I see," and the alcalde hastily filled in a discharge and handed it to the scout, saying as he did so:

"Now, there is no charge, you know."

"Thanks, senor."

"Now, what did that wicked man have to say to me?"

"Well, I heard enough to know you were in way allied to these secret foes of the valley, and for fear of death of making known all that you are of."

"Nonsense, senor, utter nonsense! Still, it is better to let it be known that I had such a charge against you, and you are not to speak of it, you know."

"Not one word I ever heard from that dying man against you, senor, shall ever pass my lips, at least as long as you don't forget."

"Then that will be all right. I will call in the Senor Otega, and you are to have a glass of wine with me."

"Thanks, but I do not often drink; the Senor Otega never does, and you must excuse us. But you will be over after the bodies, for we shall leave camp to-morrow."

"Yes, I will return with you, with two of my men, and take them in charge."

Senor Otega was again surprised when the alcalde and the scout came out together, and as Texas Jack



approaching he and his comrades hastened back to the alcalde had two men and a wagon to follow him, the bodies of the three robbers were taken back into settlement, where there was already plenty more for the landlord in his magisterial capacity, there had been a riot in the Fandango Hall, and half a dozen of men lay around dead, while many more were mangled.

Those three dead from our camp will fit in with the slain at the fandango," said Senor Otega, as he went with Buffalo Bill as they started on their homeward trail just before dawn.

Oh, yes, the alcalde will fix things up all right, and the Blue Jacket Bob's acquittal paper here," replied Buffalo Bill.

And, senor, how did you manage it?"  
"Easy enough."

Well, you played the boldest game I ever saw, and you are the first one who ever frightened Alcalde Riel, assure you. Why, not one of those men made a confession."

No, but if he thought they did, and he was guilty, it was just as well as though they had."

Yes, just as well," and Senor Otega was lost in admiration at the bold deed of Buffalo Bill in bringing the matter to terms.

Back to his ranch went Senor Otega, while Buffalo Bill and his men returned on the trail that would take them by the way of the temporary camp where poor Rio Grande Dick had lost his life.

The chief of scouts found that his orders to get ready to return to the haunted hacienda had been carried out, and all were in readiness for the move.

So Grande Rob had been given decent burial, and the men felt that their chief had been doing some splendid secret service work during his short absence from camp.

"Pards, I have found out enough to convince the most skeptical of you, that is the most ardent believer in spooks, that every spook we will have to deal with can be brought down with a bullet," said Buffalo Bill.

"I have gleaned certain information that fastens the guilt in this valley upon a man, yes, men whom no one suspects; but what we do now will bring the guilty to the end of their rope."

"Though you did not know it, there was one of our men left alone and in hiding in the haunted hacienda, and what he discovered proved that we are on the right track."

Though Buffalo Bill did not even hint as much, the men were sure that their chief had been that lone wanderer in the ruins of the fatal ranch.

Continuing in his easy way, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, men, we return to that old spook nest next, and we stay there until we lay the ghosts, mark my words."

"All I ask is for each man to give me his full support, and we'll soon strike the end of our trail."

The answer was a cheer, and the march was taken up for the fatal ranch.

If there was one of the scouts who longer felt dread of the ruin, that is, a superstitious dread, he did not show it.

The place was again occupied, and after a talk with the men, before they reached the hacienda, it was agreed by one and all that not a word should be uttered there that would in any way give their plans away.

That night a move would be made by Buffalo Bill which should lay the foundation for the laying of the spooks, and all were on the eager watch for what was to come:

## CHAPTER XII.

### BUFFALO BILL MAKES A VISIT.

Night came and Buffalo Bill was on guard at the gate with Wild Winfield.

The cattle and horses had not been driven in, as the scouts had returned home, and there were enough for four for night duty and four for day duty, with the others to look to the duties about the hacienda, and be ready for any service they might be called upon to do.

As Buffalo Bill had signified his intention of going on an expedition the next day, he carried his blankets down to the entrance to sleep there, and have Texas Jack call him.

Jack awoke the chief just at dawn, asking:

"Now, what does it mean, chief?"

"I am going to make a call—in fact, a couple of them, for I shall dine with Senor Otega, and from there go on to the hacienda of the Fair Hermit."

"Do you mean it, chief?"

"Certainly."

"Don't go there."

"Is it the fair hermit you distrust, or her cowboys?"

"It is the king of the cowboys I have no faith in, and his men will do as he tells them, as my dying friend said."

"I do not doubt that."

"He is bitter over our coming here, as all of them are, and he will seek to do you harm in some way, I am sure."

"My dear Jack, that is just why I want you and the boys along."

"Ah!"

"You are to follow my trail, you know, and, stopping at the Otega ranch later in the afternoon, some time



after my departure from there, he will give you a couple of men to accompany you, guiding you to the hacienda of the fair hermit.

"You can then go as near as you dare, meet me upon my departure, and on the return, instead of having one man to waylay, as they will expect, they will find half-a-dozen, and I will not fall into the trap."

"I see."

"I do not know that they would kill me, I rather think they would not; but just now I wish to take no chances—wish to keep out of trouble—as I am playing a little secret game myself, which you will all be let into as soon as I make a discovery or two I hope to."

"Now, follow in a couple of hours, and when you reach the Otega ranch go there alone, leaving the men in hiding."

With this Buffalo Bill rode along the trail, now well known to him, leading to the home of the Senor Otega.

He was watchful as he rode along, as he deemed it necessary that he should be.

It was within half an hour of dinner time when he reached the Otega ranch, and he was received by the senor and his lovely wife most cordially.

"You are going to be our guest for several days, I hope."

"Thank you, no, for I must go on my way this afternoon."

"I am sorry; but we will soon have dinner," and the Senora Otega left the room to see to it, when the senor remarked:

"Now, which way, senor, for I am sorry to see you alone on a trail?"

"I have company, sir, but they are not visible."

"Good!"

"My friend, Texas Jack, will be here this afternoon, and will you give him a couple of men whom you feel that you can really trust as guides?"

"I can give him a dozen men, Senor Cody, but candidly, and with shame I say it, I know of but one man on my ranch whom I would fully trust. The fact is, I do not know in whom to place confidence. They may be all faithful, and yet one may not be so, and that one might be the person I select for you."

"That is very true."

"But one man I am sure of, Palma, my cowboy chief, and he will go with you were you please."

"Thanks, senor, he will do, and if you will allow him to go with Texas Jack I will feel obliged."

"But you, senor?"

"I am going to make a visit, senor, to the hacienda of the fair recluse."

"Oh, senor!"

"Yes, and I wish you to give me full directions for reaching there."

"I will, yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I do not wish to see you go there."

"Why not?"

"The cowboy king."

"Is not the Senorita Suelo a protection upon ranch?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well?"

"She will not see you."

"I believe that she will."

"I am sure not."

"I will make the trial at least."

"But why go there?"

"I have a special desire to see her."

"In your mysterious but seemingly sure way working for an end, senor, and I say Heaven be with you."

"When I come back from my visit to the hacienda of the Senorita Suelo, I will get your cowboy chief to the mission ranch for a visit of several days; he will guide us around to the other side of that mountain where there is the retreat of the secret foes."

"I believe you are right."

"But I also will go, for you, a stranger, must all the risk in working for us here in this valley have suffered at the hands of the secret foes."

"I will accompany you, senor, and you may have my aid, as well as that of Palma."

"I shall be only too happy to have you go, senor. I shall go there for work, deadly work."

Buffalo Bill rode away from the home of the Senor Otega half an hour after he had enjoyed one of the most substantial dinners.

The ranchero was sorry to see him go, yet beginning to feel that all the scout undertook he could accomplish.

He had given him full directions for reaching the hacienda of the fair recluse.

It was situated down the valley from him, at the foot of the lake, and just half a score of miles from the Otega ranch.

Broad pasture lands were upon either side; the timber lands also, and the hacienda, as strong as a fortress, was situated upon a spur of the mountain range, commanding an extensive view.

As he drew near it, after a brisk ride, Buffalo Bill was glad to discover that there were innumerable places for Texas Jack and his men, and their approach could not be seen by any one in the hacienda.

There were thousands of cattle feeding upon the meadow lands, and a large herd of horses, showing that the hermitess was by no means poor.

Some of the cowboys herding the cattle gazed at the scout with interest as he rode along, but he paid neither to avoid nor care to meet them.

One, however, rode in such a way as to get close to the trail, and he said, as he drew near:

"Going to the hacienda, senor?"

"Yes."

"The cowboy king is not there."

"I wish to see the Senorita Suelo."

"She receives no strangers, senor."

"I shall at least try to see her."



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE FAIR HERMIT.

"will be useless."  
 "as she not cattle and horses for sale?"  
 "es, senor, but the cowboy chief attends to that."  
 "his absence who does?"  
 "ou will have to come again, senor."  
 "will ride on, however, and request to see the  
 ita."  
 "will only be refused."  
 "ery well, I can then turn back. But when will the  
 y king return?"  
 "o-night, senor."  
 "anking the man, Buffalo Bill rode on, and soon  
 ached the heavy gate of the hacienda.  
 "an stood within, looking through a small window,  
 aid, somewhat rudely:  
 "he senorita entertains no strangers beneath her  
 have not asked it, my man. But you will go and  
 the senorita that the Senor Cody desires to see her  
 few minutes."  
 "ell go, senor, but she will not see you."  
 "returned within ten minutes and said:  
 "he senorita regrets having to decline to see the  
 and that she is not able to offer him hospitality  
 uth her roof."  
 "falo Bill smiled, and taking from his pocket a note-  
 he tore out a leaf and wrote upon it:  
 "If taken from the wrist the charm is broken."  
 "e Senor Cody begs to restore the charm."  
 "and this to the senorita, my man," and a silver  
 slipped into the hand prevented any reply, as the  
 had a refusal upon his lips to bear the message.  
 "he walked off, and Buffalo Bill waited with no  
 of anxiety upon his face as to the result.  
 "ts time the gatekeeper was gone for a much longer  
 than before, and when he returned there was a puz-  
 zle upon his face, as he said:  
 "I allow you to enter, senor, for the senorita will  
 asu?"  
 "felt that she would see me," was the quiet reply  
 falo Bill.  
 "he has done so, but——"  
 "ut what?" asked Buffalo Bill, looking the evidently  
 y surprised gatekeeper straight in the eye.  
 "he senor is doubtless an old friend of the senorita?"  
 "is was ventured as though the man was cautiously  
 g his way.  
 "emay and may not be a friend."  
 "e man halted at this and said:  
 "ell, I am very sure of one thing, senor."  
 "atters nothing to me what you think; do as you  
 told to do—lead me to the presence of the senorita."  
 "e man had a dogged look and manner.  
 "appeared as though he meant not to obey the bid-  
 but there was that in the look of the scout which  
 and obedience.  
 "d so he moved on once more.

"Visitors are not allowed here, and, were the cowboy king at home, he would not have admitted you," said the man to Cody, as though determined to make another effort to talk.

"My visit is to the Senorita Suelo, not to her servant, the cowboy chief," was the stern reply.

The gateman winced, for the cowboy king evidently was all powerful in that hacienda.

The gateman did not lead the visitor into the hacienda, but, halting at the flower garden gate, said:

"The senor will find the senorita in yonder arbor."

"She does not intend to have any eavesdroppers, that is certain," muttered the scout to himself.

A short walk brought him to the arbor, a perfect bower of beauty amid the flowers that were upon all sides.

The senorita arose from a hammock, a book in her hand, as the caller approached.

Buffalo Bill halted in the arched entrance to the arbor, and what he saw was a perfect picture of loveliness.

There she stood in a slightly embarrassed way, it seemed, clad in a dress of soft, yellow silk that clung gracefully about her exquisite form.

That she was very beautiful the scout realized, as, lifting his sombrero, he bowed low before her.

"Senor, be seated," she said, and she still appeared embarrassed.

"Senorita, I have no right, perhaps, to intrude myself upon you, knowing the unwritten law of your house that no stranger must enter, but I have done so to return to you a trinket that belongs to you—one I picked up upon the scene when last we met."

As Buffalo Bill spoke, he held out the bracelet he had found upon the spot where he had rescued the Mexican officer and the maiden from the outlaws.

The face of the fair Mexican flushed and paled in turn, and, stepping forward, she said, earnestly:

"Senor, can you ever forgive me for my treatment of you that day, leaving you, as we did, after your saving the senor captain from certain death, and rescuing me from the power of cruel foes?"

"Yes, the bracelet must have been torn from my wrist unnoticed by my captors in the struggle.

"You read what is written within it, senor, so the charm is broken. I will never wear it again; no, never! For what is there graven has come true—the charm is broken."

She turned her head, and for a moment was silent, when Buffalo Bill spoke:

"I am sorry you no longer have faith in the charm; but I am glad to have returned it to you."

"Senor, I am glad you have done so, for it has given me the chance to meet you to tell you how I appreciate all you did that day. Why we left you so unceremoniously I cannot tell, for my lips are sealed."

"And who were those foes of yours, senorita?"

"I do not know."



"And the senor captain—did he recover from the cruel treatment they gave him?"

"Yes, senor."

"Senorita, I have a request to make."

"I will grant it."

"The favor I would ask is that when I come again to see you, you will see me."

"I have promised; but you must not come when the cowboy king is here, senor."

Buffalo Bill's face did not change a muscle at this remarkable request of the fair recluse.

The girl looked at him somewhat anxiously, while he answered, graciously:

"It shall be as you wish, senorita. I will now bid you *adios* and thank you for having received me."

"Then thanks are due to you, senor, and I wish you would tell me if in any way I can serve you."

"By allowing me to call again, as you have promised, if I deem it best to come."

"You have my promise."

"And may I again ask if you have any idea of who the men were who attacked you that day?"

"I have not."

"Were they not the secret foes?"

"No, senor."

"I did not know but that they might be," said Buffalo Bill, in a peculiar way.

"No, senor, they were not of that band. Their masked leader was a foe to—to—the senor captain, and to me, I know; but, just who he is I am not aware. He wanted gold, and revenge, as well, it seemed, but he thwarted his purpose as far as getting money was concerned, for, but for your coming, as you so bravely did, he would have killed the senor captain, and from me he would have obtained nothing.

"The outlaws were strangers in the valley, senor, save their chief, and just who he was I do not know, as I have stated."

"Perhaps when I call again, senorita, I may be able to inform you as to his identity."

"Ah! can you? Oh, can you, senor?"

"I may," was the cautious reply, and, declining the offer of refreshments, the scout took his leave, the senorita offering her hand as she bade him farewell.

He had gone but a few steps when Senorita Suelo called to him, and coming rapidly up to where he had halted, she said:

"Senor, this valley is full of dangerous characters, and one knows not whom to trust. You are going alone upon a dangerous trail, and I warn you that you may be halted and held up, as they say here. This will protect you from robbery, perhaps from death. Wear it!" and she took from the silk scarf about her neck a pin of unique design and fastened it upon the lapel of Buffalo Bill's jacket.

"Senorita, I will keep it as a souvenir of you; it will doubtless be a charm to protect me.

"I thank you," and again bidding the beautiful girl good-by, Buffalo Bill left the garden, crossed the

plaza to where his horse awaited him, and rode the gate.

There stood the keeper, who now saluted him in marked respect, again saying:

"You are the first stranger, senor, who ever as to entrance to this hacienda."

As Buffalo Bill rode along he was not forgetting in great danger, and he was surprised when he did not see the ranch cowboys he had seen when he was on his way to visit the fair hermit.

He was riding quietly along when he saw a horse approaching, a splendid-looking man, well-mounted and with silver-mounted Mexican saddle and bridle.

Buffalo Bill knew him at once from what he had heard of the cowboy king.

Both saluted and halted, the cowboy king saying: "Off your trail, senor?"

"No, for I have been to the hacienda."

"And why?"

"That I consider none of your business."

"I shall make it my affair, Senor Cody, and you are covered by my men," responded the cowboy king.

It was true, for four men were peering over the bushes with rifles leveled at the scout, who said:

"So it seems; but do you not respect this badge and he pointed to the pin Suelo had given him.

"Not this time, for you are too dangerous a man to be at large. I know you, Buffalo Bill."

"And I know you, now, for you were a deserter from the army, and later became a finished cutthroat; thought you were dead, Dallas Mowbray."

"No, I left the northern country several years ago. It became too hot for me, and came back to the Southwest, for I am really a Mexican, you know, and was once an officer of the Mexican army, but was exiled for certain acts. You see, I don't mind telling you that I regard you as good as dead."

"Thanks; but while there is life, there is hope."

"So I have found out; but I'll fix you now—here, come here!"

The four men came, their rifles still loaded; but when they neared the scout there were several shots heard, then one.

The first came from some thick timber close at hand, and the four men with rifles dropped dead.

The single shot was from Buffalo Bill's revolver, and he was quick to take advantage of the volley in his favor. He had sent a bullet through the heart of the cowboy king.

The next moment Texas Jack, four of his pards, Senor Otega and his cowboy chief, Palma, came in view.

"You were just in time, Jack, and I thank you."

"Find the horses of those four men, strap the boys in the saddles, and we'll take them to our ranch tonight, and to-morrow there will be two visits for you to make, and in full force, for I can see the beginning of the end of our trail."

"As I also can, chief," answered Texas Jack.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## REVEALED.

in did Buffalo Bill pay a visit to the hacienda of the hermit.

It was the day following his meeting with the cowboy

when he was received, and in the garden, as before, the señorita said:

"You have come sooner than I expected, señor; but well, as the cowboy king is not here."

"Why do you fear that man?"

"Oh! I cannot tell."

"What is he to you?"

"Do not ask me."

"Do you love him?"

"No!"

She fairly hissed the word in her earnestness.

"I am glad, for I can tell you that you need no longer fear him."

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"Señorita, I have read your secret, for that man was

a Mexican officer I saved with you from those men

many nearly two months ago."

"You recognize him, then?"

"Yes, and as a vile cutthroat who joined our army,

and the paymaster, deserted, and became a fugitive

an outlaw, at last, as we believed, being killed, but,

instead, coming here. Did you not know him as all that

bad?"

"Señor, I was deceived by him, for I believed him an

officer of the Mexican army. I was left this place, and

he urged me to marry him secretly, and I did so, then

came here to live, and obeying him blindly. At times

longing here, I believing he was on duty when he was

away."

"It was when he was here that you rescued us, and

the men I now think were not outlaws, but those who

detected him of certain deeds and determined to kill

him. Perhaps they were my own cowboys, who sought

to kill him, not wishing a master over them."

"Of late, I have had reason to doubt him, and I meant

to know the truth, even if he killed me, as he has often

threatened to do."

"Have no fear now, for he is dead."

"No, no, it cannot be, for he bears a charmed life."

"It has ended—the charm is broken, as was the case

when you lost your bracelet."

"Which he gave to me; but do you know that he is

dead?"

"I killed him, Señorita Suela Sada," calmly said

Buffalo Bill.

"You?"

"Yes, I made you a widow, I am glad to say, for that

man was the leader of the secret foes of this valley, the

man who has put the curse upon it which all have

suffered."

"God bless you, señor, for those words. You have

done me from worse than death. But only lately did I

suspect that he was really bad at heart, and the words I

came to me by a secret letter, and I was told to

carefully watch his movements and I would discover the

truth."

"My servants here are innocent, all in the hacienda,

but I believe all the cowboys are guilty, and were members of his band."

"I know that they were; but let me tell you that they are all prisoners now, for I led my men to their retreat last night, on the cliffs, back of my ranch, and through a secret entrance into the old hacienda, surprised their hidden camp."

"They had there a score of prisoners, men, women and children, held for ransom, and I learned the story from dying lips, and enough more to enable us, under Señor Otega and his chief of cowboys, to find the secret entrance to the cliffs."

"We set free all who were there, killed the five guards over them, and to-day rounded up and captured your cowboys, seven in number, who shared the ransoms paid with their chief."

"You were not guilty, I know, Señorita Suela Moro, for such is your name as Dallas Moro's wife; but you will be so thought by many in this valley, and my advice is that you at once leave here and seek a home elsewhere, where no cloud hangs over your life, and Señor Otega will see to your property here."

"Señor Cody, again I say, 'God bless you,' and from my heart I thank you more than words can tell. I have an ample fortune of my own, independent of this accursed ranch, where I have known only sorrow; but what I have done he forced me to do. To Señor Otega I leave this ranch, cattle and all, for him to dispose of, and pay back to those who have paid ransom, every dollar they have been cheated out of."

"Señor, with my few faithful servants I will leave here at sunset, and into your hands will I give the paper by which Señor Otega can act for me."

From his heart Buffalo Bill pitied the beautiful and unhappy woman, and he was glad, a few hours after, to see her and her few faithful servants depart from the hacienda forever, while Señor Otega willingly accepted the duty, to carry out the mission she had entrusted to him, through Cody.

As quickly as Buffalo Bill and his secret sleuths had entered the mysterious valley, they departed from it, carrying with them their horses and cattle, and their prisoners also, to deliver over to the commandant of the fort nearest the scene, and who held control of that part of the country.

Among the prisoners was Riel, the innkeeper, who, next to the cowboy king, "El Diablo," as his men called him, was the guilty one in the many crimes committed in the beautiful valley.

It is needless to say that quick punishment was visited upon all the prisoners, and Buffalo Bill and his sleuths of the saddle gained great praise for their splendid services rendered, and General Carrol sent a special report to headquarters about the great chief of scouts' brilliant achievement.

As to the beautiful valley, it is as peaceful to-day as a Quaker village, and the fair hermit of the hacienda is forgotten for she was never heard of again by those who dwelt in the Silver Lake settlement, while the haunted ranch remains but a ruin, surrounded by its graves.

THE END.

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